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# THE HUNDREDTH MAN

BY

FRANK R. STOCKTON

*AUTHOR OF "RUDDER GRANGE," "THE LADY, OR THE TIGER?" "THE LATE MRS. NULL," "THE CASTING AWAY OF MRS. LECKS AND MRS. ALESHINE," ETC.*

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# THE HUNDREDTH MAN

## CHAPTER I

N one of the liveliest portions of a very lively metropolitan street was situated the popular resort known as Vatoldi's. It was a restaurant which owed its extensive patronage to the inducements it offered to persons of refined tastes and moderate purses. It was in a shopping district, and from early breakfast-time until a very late dinner or supper hour, Vatoldi's seemed never to be without customers, and John People seemed always to be behind the little desk near the entrance of the long and handsome room. In fact he was not always there, because his manifold duties required his presence in a great many places, but if a customer looked up from his meal and did not see John at his ordinary post, he would be very likely to see him there the next time he looked up, and thus an impression was produced on the minds of patrons similar to the impression given by the juggler who makes one believe that because an object has been in one place a great many times it is always there.

John People was a young man of vigorous and rotund figure, with a slightly upturned nose, very light-brown hair brushed smoothly on his well-rounded head, and a general expression of sad good humor combined with sleepless perspicacity. Dutiful resignation to his lot raised his eyebrows and slightly wrinkled his forehead, but his wide open eyes gazed steadily on the business in hand as if they had nothing to do with the future or with retrospection, no matter how the brow might choose to occupy itself.

There was about John an air of strong independence associated with a kindly willingness, which made it a pleasant thing to watch him as he attended to his varied duties. He was the chief man and manager at Vatoldi's, and although the cooks cooked, the waiters waited, and the little boy opened the door for the ladies, as they had been taught to cook, wait, and open, they all appeared to act under John's personal direction, as if they had been an orchestra moved by a conductor's baton. He was not the owner of the establishment, and yet he was the only visible head. Early in the morning he went to the markets and selected the most desirable meats and vegetables. He personally inspected the commodities of grocers and fruiterers, and he brought a keen investigation to bear upon the necessary supplies of wines and malt liquors. All expenditures were made by him, and all receipts went into his money drawer, and were daily deposited by him in a neighboring bank. But, although he thus stood at the head of affairs, there seemed to be nothing which John was unwilling to

do. If a truck arrived with some heavy merchandise, John would put his hat upon his smoothly brushed locks, and, with a slightly rolling yet energetic step, would proceed to the sidewalk and give what directions might be needed, even sometimes lending a very strong hand to a piece of difficult lifting or lowering. The moment this duty was done he would step vigorously back to his post, hang up his hat, leaving his locks as smoothly brushed as ever, and be ready again to receive the money of his customers. There was a young man who acted as cashier during his superior's occasional absences from the desk, but nearly all the money that went into the till passed directly through John People's hands.

Vatoldi's was a remarkably well-ordered establishment; its viands, its service, and its general equipment were all of the best; and yet its prices were extremely reasonable. To combine the advantages of the two classes of restaurants generally found in American cities seemed to be the moving principle of John People's mind. To dine or lunch well at Vatoldi's, one did not need to bring a friend with him to share the expense and help eat a supply of food overabundant for one person. Instead of that, one had enough, paid not too much, and went away with pocket and stomach equally satisfied. There was nothing, however, in the aspect of Vatoldi's to suggest the ordinary cheap American restaurant. There were no shelves filled with tin cans and bottles, no tables spread with pies and cakes. Everything was in tasteful order, and placards of any kind were totally

tabooed. Even on the outer front one read but the words, above the plate-glass door:

"VATOLDI,
BREAKFAST AND DINING ROOMS."

Yet there was not a total absence of display of viands. After the fashion common to English hostelries, a large round table stood near the center of the room, on which were set out huge cold joints, poultry, and game, in order that such persons who knew, or supposed they knew, exactly what they liked to eat, could say to the waiter, "Cut me a slice from here, or there," or, "Let me have the liver wing of that fowl." It was surprising with what faithfulness the clear eyes of John People, looking out from under his resigned brow, kept themselves upon these details.

It was towards the end of May, and the weather was getting to be very pleasant for outdoor life, and it was about one o'clock in the day,—an hour at which the thought of Vatoldi's began to be very pleasant to a great many people,—when there walked into the already well-filled room a tall gentleman, who took his seat at a small table at the extreme upper end of the room. As he walked slowly up the whole extent of the apartment, his glossy hat held carefully in one hand, while the other carried his silver-mounted cane, most of the people seated at the tables looked upon him as he passed; and he, in turn, gazed from side to side with such particularity that his eyes fell upon every person in the room, to many of whom he bowed, or rather nodded, with a certain

stiffened graciousness that was peculiarly a manner of his own. This gentleman was a regular habitué of Vatoldi's, and was a personage so very well known in the metropolis that he seldom entered an assembly of any size in which he did not meet some one with whom he was acquainted. His name was Mr. Stull, or, as signed by himself, J. Weatherby Stull. He was not only tall, but large, bony, and heavy. His clothes were of a costly quality, and had the appearance of being quite new. He had a good deal of watch chain, and wore several heavy rings. His manner was grave and even solemn, but, when occasion required it, he would endeavor to produce upon the minds of his inferiors the impression that there were moments when they need not look up to J. Weatherby Stull. This was a concession which he deemed due from himself to mankind.

Mr. Stull was a very rich man, and his business operations were of various kinds. He was president of a bank; he was a large owner and improver of real estate, and it was generally understood that he had money invested in several important enterprises. He lived with his family, in a handsome house, in a fashionable quarter of the city, and his household affairs were conducted with as much state as he considered compatible with republican institutions.

In addition to his other occupations, Mr. Stull was the proprietor of Vatoldi's, but this fact was known to no one in the world but himself and John People.

This establishment, which he had owned for many years, had been placed, upon the death of the former manager, in the charge of John People. John was a

young man to hold such a responsible position, but Mr. Stull had known him from a boy and felt that he could trust him. Mr. Stull was a very good judge of the quality of subordinates, especially in a business of this kind. Those who gave John People credit for keeping such an excellent restaurant, and even those who supposed that the never-to-be-seen Vatoldi might sometimes help him with advice, gave the young man entirely too much credit. He was capable, quick-sighted, willing, and honest, but he seldom did anything of importance which had not been planned and ordered by M. Stull.

This gentleman was, in fact, one of the best restaurant keepers in the world. His habits of thought, his qualities of mind, all combined to make him nearly perfect in his vocation. Every day, after John had made his deposit at Mr. Stull's bank, he went into the president's private room and had a talk with him. If anybody noticed his entrance it was supposed that the young man was consulting with Mr. Stull in regard to the investment of his profits. But nothing of this kind ever took place. John had no share in the business and no profits, and the conversation turned entirely upon beef, lamb, mutton, early shad, and vegetables, and the most minute details of the management of Vatoldi's kitchen and dining and breakfast room. Every afternoon John received careful directions as to what he was to buy, what dishes he was to have prepared, and, in general, what he was to do on the following day. On the following day he did all this, and Vatoldi's was the most popular resort of its kind in the city.

But, notwithstanding the fact that in the management of his restaurant Mr. Stull showed a talent of the highest order, and notwithstanding the fact that his present wealth was founded on the profits of this establishment, and that its continued success was the source of higher pride and satisfaction than the success of any other of his enterprises, he would not, on any account, have it known that he was the proprietor of Vatoldi's. His sense of personal dignity, and the position of himself and family in society positively forbade that the world should know that J. Weatherby Stull was the keeper of a restaurant. He had thought, at times, of cutting loose from this dangerous secret and selling Vatoldi's; but there were many objections to this plan. He did not wish to lose the steady income the business gave him, an income that could always be depended upon, no matter what the condition of stocks and real estate; he did not wish to give up the positive pleasure which the management of the establishment afforded him; and he felt that it would be a hazardous thing to attempt to sell the business without betraying his connection with it.

So Vatoldi's went on, and Mr. Stull's position went up, and John People's honor and vigilance, the rock on which they both rested, was always to be depended upon.

Mr. Stull always took his luncheon at Vatoldi's, and he believed that the fact of his being a constant patron of the establishment was one cause of its popularity. If a man in his high position took his

meals there, other people of fashion and position would be likely to do the same.

"I like Vatoldi's," he would say to his friends, "because you can get as good a meal there as at any of the high-priced fancy places, without having to pay for any nonsense and frippery. Of course the extra cost of taking my meals at one of these fashionable restaurants would make very little difference to me now, but I should never have reached the position in which I at present find myself if I had not always made it a point to get the worth of my money. And, besides, it's a sensible place. They give you steel knives for your meats, and keep the silvered ones for fish and fruit, just as it's done in high-toned English society. And you are waited on by men who look like clean waiters, and not like dirty gentlemen."

As on this fine May afternoon Mr. Stull sat at his meal, which was the best the place afforded, for in every way he liked to set a good example to those around him, his eyes continually traversed the length and breadth of the room; and had there been anything out of the way John People would have heard of it that afternoon when he came to the bank. While he was thus engaged, a coupé, drawn by a pair of small sorrel horses, with tails trimmed in English fashion, stopped before Vatoldi's, and a handsomely dressed young lady got out and entered the restaurant. Mr. Stull's eyes brightened a little at this incident, and he looked about to see if other people had ticed the entrance of the new-comer. The young was his oldest daughter, and he had always en- d his family to come to Vatoldi's whenever

they happened to be shopping at lunch-time. He did not think it wise to say so, but he liked them to come in a carriage. Whenever bad weather gave him an excuse, he always came in a carriage himself. Nothing would have pleased him better than to have the street in front of Vatoldi's blocked by waiting carriages.

The entrance of Miss Stull had not been more quickly and earnestly noticed by her father than by John People. The eyes of that young man were fixed upon her from the moment she leaned forward to open the carriage door until she had been conducted to an advantageous vacant table. This was not near the one occupied by her father, for the young lady did not care to walk so far into the room as that.

In a refrigerator, near his little desk, John kept, under his own charge, certain cuts of choice meats which he handed out to be cooked for those customers who had specific tastes in regard to such things. In one corner of this refrigerator John kept a little plate on which always reposed a brace of especially tender lamb chops, a remarkably fine sweet-bread, or some other dainty of the kind. When Miss Stull happened to come in, the waiter was always immediately instructed to say that they had that day some very nice chops or sweet-bread, as the case might be; and the young lady being easily guided in matters of taste of this kind generally ordered the viand which John had kept in reserve for her. Sometimes, when she did not come for several days, John was obliged to give to some one

else the delicacy he had reserved for her, but he always did this with a sigh which deepened the lines of dutiful resignation on his brow.

Miss Stull was a young lady of rather small dimensions, quite pretty, of a bright mind and affable disposition, and entirely ignorant that there was a man in the world who for three days would keep for her a brace of lamb chops in a corner of a refrigerator. John's secret was as carefully kept as that of his employer, but the conduct of Vatoldi's was no greater pleasure to Mr. Stull than were the visits to that establishment of Mr. Stull's daughter to John People.

When Mr. Stull had finished his meal, he walked slowly down the room and stopped at the table where his daughter still sat. That young lady thereupon offered to finish her meal instantly, and take her father to the bank in the coupé.

"No, my dear," said Mr. Stull, "there is no occasion for that. Never hurry while you eat, and be sure to eat all you want. Do you continue to like Vatoldi's?"

"Oh, yes, papa," said Miss Stull, "everything is very nice here, and I am sure the place is respectable."

"It is more than respectable," said Mr. Stull, a little warmly. Then, toning down his voice, he continued: "If it were not everything it ought to be, I should not come here myself, nor recommend you and your mother to do so. I always find it well filled with the best class of people, many of them ladies. Bye-bye until dinner-time."

Then he walked to the desk and paid the amount of his bill to John People, with never a word, a gesture,

or a look which could indicate to the most acute observer that he was putting the money into his own pocket.

Mr. Stull had scarcely creaked himself out of Vatoldi's when there entered an elderly man dressed in a suit of farmer's Sunday clothes. His trousers were gray and very wide, his black frock-coat was very long, and his felt hat, also black, had a very extensive brim. Deep set in his smooth-shaven face were a pair of keen gray eyes which twinkled with pleasure, as, with outstretched hand, he walked straight up to the desk behind which John People stood. John cordially grasped the hand which was offered him, and the two men expressed their satisfaction at seeing each other in tones much louder than would have been thought proper by Mr. Stull, had he been present.

"I am glad to see you, Uncle Enoch," said John. "How did you leave mother?"

"She's as lively and chipper as ever," said the other. "But I didn't come here only to see you, I came to get somethin' to eat. I want my dinner now, and I'll stop in in the afternoon, when people have thinned out, and have a talk with you."

As he said this, Mr. Enoch Bullripple moved towards the only vacant place which he saw, and it happened to be on the opposite side of the little table at which Miss Stull still sat, slowly eating an ice. At first John seemed about to protest against his uncle's seating himself at this sacred table, although, indeed, it afforded abundance of room for two persons; but then it shot into his mind that it would be a sort of

bond of union between himself and the young lady to have his uncle sit at the same table with her. This was not much of a bond, but it was the only thing of the kind that had ever come between Miss Stull and himself.

When Mr. Bullripple had taken his seat, and had ordered an abundant dinner of meat and vegetables, he pushed aside the bill of fare, and his eyes fell upon Miss Stull, who sat opposite to him. After a steady gaze of a few moments, he said: "How d'ye do?"

Miss Stull, who had thrown two or three glances of interest at her opposite neighbor, which were due to his air of countrified spruceness, now gave him a quick look of surprise, but made no answer.

"Isn't this Matilda Stull?" said the old man. "I'm Enoch Bullripple, and if I'm not a good deal mistaken your father had a farm that he used to come out to in summer-time that was pretty nigh where I lived, which is a couple of miles from Cherry Bridge."

Miss Stull, who at first had been a little shocked at being addressed by a stranger, now smiled and answered: "Oh, yes, I remember you very well, although I never saw you before dressed in this way. You always wore a straw hat, and went about in your shirt sleeves. And you would never let us walk across your big grass field."

"It wasn't on account of your hurtin' the grass," said Mr. Bullripple, "for you couldn't do that, but I don't like to see young gals in pastur' fields where there's ugly cattle. I hope you don't bear me no grudge for keepin' you out of danger."

"Oh, no," said Miss Stull. "In fact, I'm much obliged to you."

When John People looked over the desk and saw his uncle talking to Miss Stull, he turned pale. This was a bond of union he had not imagined possible. He felt that his duty called upon him to protest, but when he saw the young lady entering into the conversation with apparent willingness he made no motion to interfere, but stood staring at the two with such wide-eyed earnestness that a gentleman coming up to pay his bill had to rap twice on the desk before he gained John's attention.

"How's your father?" said Mr. Bullripple.

Miss Stull replied that he was quite well, and the other continued: "That's my sister's son over there, behind the desk. He pretty much runs this place as far as I can make out, for whenever I come here I never see nothin' of Vatoldi, who must do his work in the kitchen if he does any. John's mother used to have the farm that your father owned afterwards, and he was born there. But I guess you don't know nothin' about all that."

"Was that young man born at our farm?" said Miss Stull, looking over towards John with the first glance of interest she had ever bestowed upon him.

"Yes, that's where he was born," said Mr. Bullripple; "but he lived with me when you was out there, and his mother, too, which she does yet; and I wish John could get a chance to come out there sometimes for a little country air. But Vatoldi keeps him screwed tight to his work, and it's only now and then

of a Sunday that we get sight of him, unless we come to town ourselves."

"That is very mean of Vatoldi," said Miss Stull, rising, "for I am sure everybody ought to have a holiday now and then. Good-morning, Mr. Bullripple."

As Miss Stull advanced towards the desk John People knew that she was going to speak to him. He felt this knowledge coming hot up into his cheeks, tingling among the resignation lines on his brow, and running like threads of electricity down his back and into his very knees, which did not seem to give him their usual stout and unyielding support. Whether it was from the manner of her walk, or the steady gaze of her eyes, or the expression of her mouth, that this knowledge came to him, it came correctly, for she had no sooner reached the desk and laid her money and her bill upon it, than she said:

"Your uncle tells me, sir, that you were born on the farm where we used to live, near Cherry Bridge."

"Yes miss," says John, "I was born there."

"Of course, there is no reason why this should not have been so," said Miss Stull, pushing her money towards John; "but, somehow or other, it seems odd to me. What is your name, please?"

John told her, and as she slowly dropped her change into her pocket-book Miss Stull began to think. Had her father been there he would not have been slow to take her aside and inform her that, for a young lady in her position, with a coupé and pair waiting at the door, it was highly improper to stand and think by the desk in a restaurant, with a person like John People

behind it. But Miss Stull was a young women of a very independent turn of mind. She placed a good value on fashion and form and all that sort of thing, but she did not allow her social position to interfere too much with her own ideas of what was good for her.

"There was an old — lady," she said, presently, "whom I used to see very often, and her name was Mrs. People. I liked her better than your uncle. Was she your mother?"

"Yes," said John, "she is my mother."

"That is very nice," remarked Miss Stull, and with a little nod she said "Good-morning, Mr. People," and went out to her coupé.

John smoothed out the bank-note which she had given him, and on the back of it he wrote "M. S.," and put the day of the month and the year beneath it. He left a space between the two initials so he could put in the middle one when he found out what it was. Then he took a note of the same value from his pocket, and put it in the money drawer, and folding carefully the one he had received from Miss Stull, he placed it tenderly in an inner receptacle of his pocket-book.

## CHAPTER II

R. BULLRIPPLE returned to Vatoldi's about the middle of the afternoon to have a talk with his nephew, but the young man who had charge of the desk during this period of comparative inactivity told him that Mr. People had gone to the bank.

Mr. Bullripple reflected for a moment.

"Well, then," said he, "I would like to see Mr. Vatoldi."

The young man behind the desk laughed.

"There isn't any such person," said he. "That's only the name of the place."

Mr. Bullripple looked at him fixedly. "I'd like to know, then," he said, "who is at the head of this establishment."

"Mr. People is. If you want to sell anything, or if you have got a bill to collect, you must go to him."

Mr. Bullripple was about to whistle, but he restrained himself, his eyes sparkling as he put on his mental brakes. "Well, then," he said, "I suppose I must wait till I can see Mr. People." And, without other words, he left the place.

"I suppose I might have waited," said Enoch Bull- as he slowly strode up the street, "but, on the

whole, I'd as lief not see John jus' now. No Vatoldi, eh? That's a piece of news, I must say!"

Mr. Bullripple did not try again to see his nephew that day. He spent the rest of the afternoon in attending to the business that brought him to the city; and, about eight o'clock, he found himself in one of the uptown cross-streets, walking slowly with a visiting card in his hand, looking for a number that was printed thereon. He discovered it before long, but stopped surprised.

"It looks like a hotel," he said, "but eighty-two is the number. There can't be no mistake about that."

So saying, he mounted the few broad steps which led to the front door, and looked for a bell. The house was one of those large apartment houses, so popular in New York, but with mansions of this kind the old man was totally unfamiliar. He did not know that it was necessary to touch the button by the side of the doorway; but, while he was peering about, the hall-boy saw him from within, and admitted him. The house was not one of the largest and finest of its class, but its appointments were of a high order. The floor was inlaid with different colored marbles, and the walls and ceiling were handsomely decorated.

"Does Mr. Horace Stratford live here?" asked Mr. Bullripple.

"Yes," said the boy, who was attired in a neat suit of brown clothes with brass buttons, "fifth floor. There's the elevator."

The old man looked in at the door of the brightly lighted elevator, and then he glanced wistfully at the

broad stairway which wound up beside it. But, repeating to himself the words "fifth floor," he entered the elevator. Thereupon a second boy in brown clothes with brass buttons stepped in after him, closed the door, pulled the wire rope, and Enoch Bullripple made his first ascent in a machine of this kind. He did not like it. "I'll come down by the stairs," he said to himself; "that is, if they run up that far." Arrived at the fifth floor, the door was opened, and Enoch gladly stepped out, whereupon the elevator immediately descended to the depths below. To the right of the hall in which he now found himself was a door on which was a small brass plate bearing the name "H. Stratford." On this door Mr. Bullripple knocked with his strong, well-hardened knuckles.

The door was opened by an elderly serving-man, who came very quickly to see who it could be who would knock on the door instead of touching the electric bell-knob. Mr. Stratford was at home, and when the visitor had sent in his name he was, without delay, conducted to a large and handsome room, at the door of which Mr. Stratford met him with extended hand.

"Why, Enoch," he said, "I am glad to see you. How do you do? And how is Mrs. People?"

"Spry as common," said Enoch. And putting down his hat and umbrella, he seated himself in a large easy-chair which Mr. Stratford pushed towards him, and gazed around.

The floor was covered with rich heavy rugs; furniture of antique beauty and modern luxury stood

wherever it could find an inviting place; the walls were hung with water-colors and etchings; here and there appeared a bass-relief or a bit of old tapestry; some book-shelves of various shapes and heights were crowded with volumes in handsome bindings, larger books stood upon the floor; while portfolios of engravings and illustrated books were piled up on a table in one corner of the room; articles of oddity or beauty, picked up by a traveler in his wanderings, were scattered about on mantel-piece or cabinet-shelf; a wood fire blazed behind polished andirons and fender; and, near by, a large table held a shaded lamp, some scattered books and journals, a jar of tobacco, and the amber-tipped pipe which Mr. Stratford had just laid down. Through a partly-drawn portière, which covered a wide doorway at one side of the room, could be caught a glimpse of another apartment, lighted and bright-walled; and beyond the still open door by which the visitor had entered he saw across the handsome hall, with its polished floor and warm-hued rugs, other doors and glimpses of other rooms. Only the apartment in which he sat was open to view, but at every side there came suggestions of light, color, and extent. Everything was bright, warm, and akin to life and living.

Mr. Bullripple put his broad hands upon his knees and gave his head a little jerk. "Well, this beats me!" he said.

Mr. Stratford laughed. "You seem surprised, Enoch," he said. "What is it that 'beats' you?"

"It isn't the fine things," said the old man, "nor the rooms, without no end to 'em as far as I can see,

for, of course, if you've got money enough you can have 'em, but it's the idee that a man, with a top-sawyer palace like this of his own, should come up-country to Mrs. People and me, with our scrubbed floors and hard chairs, and nothin' prettier than a tea company's chromo in our best room."

"Now, come," said Mr. Stratford, "that won't do, Enoch, that won't do. Your house is a very pleasant old farm-house, and I am sure that Mrs. People makes my room as comfortable and as cozy as a fisherman and country stroller should need. And, besides, I don't come to your house for things like these," waving his hand before him as he spoke; "I can buy them with money; but what I get when I come up to your country can't be bought."

"That's true as to part of it," said Mr. Bullripple. "The victuals and the lodgin' you do pay for, but the takin' in as one of us, and the dividing up our family cousarns with you, just as free as we quarter a pie and give you one of the pieces, is somethin' that's not for sale neither by me nor Mrs. People. And if you can stand our hard boards and country fixin's after all this king and queen furnitur', we'll be mighty glad to have you keep on comin'. And that's one of the things that brought me here to-night. I wanted to ask you if we was to expect you when the summer shows signs of bein' on hand?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Stratford, "I certainly expect to be with you this summer, and as early as usual. Has anybody caught that old trout in the meadow brook?"

"No, sir," said Enoch. "I have seen him already this year, an' he's jes' as smart and knowin' as ever.

Now I take you into the family, Mr. Stratford, jus' the same as to that trout as to any of our other consarns. If you ketch him, he's your'n, if I ketch him, he's mine. It'll be fair play between us, and I'll wait till you come. I wouldn't do more'n that for no man."

"No, I don't believe you would," said Mr. Stratford earnestly.

"There's another thing I want to ask you about," said Enoch, "and I will get through with it as soon as I can, for I don't want to keep you up too late talkin' about my affairs."

"Up too late!" said Mr. Stratford. And he smiled as he looked at the clock.

"I suppose you don't mind," said Mr. Bullripple, "settin' up till ten or eleven, but I do; and so I'll get right at it. What I want to say is about my nephew, John People."

"Your sister's son?" said Mr. Stratford. "Is he still cashier at Vatoldi's?"

"Yes," said Mr. Bullripple. "He's that, and pretty much everythin' besides, as far as I can see. I don't know that he washes the dishes, but I'm sure he sees that it's done. You don't happen to know Vatoldi?"

"No," said Mr. Stratford. "I seldom go there, as the place is generally crowded with ladies about the middle of the day, the only time I would be likely to drop in; and I don't suppose I should ever see the man, if I did go. Is your nephew in any trouble."

"No," said the other, "he don't seem to be. It's me and his mother that's in the trouble. It's our opinion he works too hard, and gets too little. We like to see him come out to the farm sometimes to

take some sniffs of the air he was born in, but he never gets no time for that, and as for makin' money, I'm sure he's not doin' it. Now I thought that perhaps you might know Mr. Vatoldi, and could tell me what sort of man he is, so I could know what sort of ground I'm standin' on when I go to speak to him. Perhaps you might have heard somethin' about him that would help to put me on the right tack?"

Mr. Stratford reflected for a moment before answering. "No," said he, "I know nothing about the man whatever. But let me give you a piece of advice, friend Enoch. If it is considered well to say anything to your nephew's employer about the young man's duties and his pay, let him say it himself. You can talk to him about it, and then let him speak to Vatoldi. It is a bad thing, for all parties, for mothers and uncles to undertake to arrange the business affairs of persons as old as your nephew. He must be twenty-five."

"He's all of that," said Enoch, "and it's time he was doin' better. But I won't trouble you no more about him. Since you don't know Vatoldi, there's nothin' more for us to say about that. I've found out that you're comin' to the farm this summer, and that's enough business for one night, an' pretty nigh bedtime too." And Mr. Bullripple arose, and took up his hat and umbrella. "Now, I come to think of it," he said, "have you found your hundredth man yet?"

"No," answered Mr. Stratford, with a smile, "I can't say that I have; but I have a fancy that I'm on his track and that I may come up with him before very long."

"I often ketch myself laughin' out loud," said Mr. Bullripple, "an' I hope I won't never do it in church, when I think of your chasin' after that hundredth man. You make a dive at a feller an' ketch him by the leg, an' hold him up, an' look at him, and then you say: 'No, he's not the one,' an' drop him, an' go after somebody else. I don't believe you'll ever get him."

"I suppose the idea seems very odd to you, Enoch," said Mr. Stratford, "but when I find my man I'll tell you all about him."

"When they told me down-stairs that you lived on the fifth floor," said Mr. Bullripple, as he stepped into the private hall and gazed about him at the tall clock, the antique chairs, the trophy-covered walls, the many-hued glass of the great lantern which hung above him, and the partly curtained doorways here and there, "I had a sort o' pity for you for havin' to lodge up so near the top of the house. But it don't appear to me now that you're in need of pity."

"No," said Mr. Stratford, "not in that regard, at any rate. As I own the whole house I might have had any floor I chose, but this one seemed to suit me better than the others, being high and airy, and yet not quite at the top of the house. There are two floors above me."

"You own this whole house!" exclaimed Mr. Bullripple. "Well, upon my word!" For a moment he stood still, and then he resumed: "I was thinkin', as I was sittin' in there, that I'd get Mrs. People to buy some bits of fancified carpets, and to hang up some more picters an' things about the

house. But I guess now we'd better pull up an' take down everything of the sort we've got. I should say that after all this you'd like us better in bare boards than with any sort of fixin's we could rig up."

"Now listen to me, friend Enoch," said Mr. Stratford. "If you and your sister make any changes in that delightful old farm-house which I know so well, I'll get up in the middle of the night and catch your big trout, and never give you a chance to measure or weigh him."

"All right," said old Enoch, with a grin. "I guess you'll find us jes' as you left us."

"Are you not going to take the elevator?" said Mr. Stratford, as his visitor, after shaking hands with him, stepped briskly towards the stairway.

"No," said the old man, "I like my legs better." And down-stairs he went.

"Now," said Mr. Bullripple to himself, when he was out upon the sidewalk, "I think I'll follow that advice Mr. Stratford give me not to speak to old Vatoldi, for I don't believe there's any such man, but I won't let on to John that I've got any idee of that kind. I'll look into things a little more before I do that."

Horace Stratford returned to his library, his study, or his parlor, whatever one might choose to call the room in which he took his ease, or did his work, as the case might be, and, resuming his seat by the table, he lighted his pipe. He was a man of thirty years, or something more; young enough to do what he pleased, and old enough to think what he pleased. To these two pursuits he devoted his life. Possessed

of a fair fortune, he invested nearly the whole of it in this apartment-house, which had been built according to his own ideas, and which yielded him a satisfying income. He was not a foolishly eccentric man, nor a selfish one, but he lived for himself, and in his own way. However, if a time came for him to live for other people, he did so cheerfully, but he always did it in his own way.

There were those who looked upon him as an old bachelor; others thought of him as a good match; and others again considered him as a hard-headed fellow whom it would be very unpleasant to live with. But the latter were persons who had never lived with him.

Horace Stratford was not an idler. He was a man of ideas, and his principal business in life was to work out these ideas, either to please or benefit himself, or for the pleasure or benefit of others.

At present he was engaged in the study of a character, or, it might be better said, in the search for a character. It had come to him, in the course of his reading and thought, that in every hundred books on a kindred subject, in every hundred crimes of a similar kind, in every hundred events of a like nature, and in every hundred men who may come within one's cognizance, there is one book, crime, circumstance, or man, which stands up above and distinct from the rest, preëminent in the fact that no one of the others is or could have been like it.

Horace Stratford's immediate occupation was the discovery of a hundredth man among his present friends and associates. This man, when found, was

to be the central figure in a piece of literary work he had in mind. As the tests he applied were severe ones, he already had had several disappointments. No one of the persons he had selected had been able to maintain against his ninety-nine competitors the position in the regard of the investigator to which he had been temporarily exalted.

Mr. Stratford sat reading and smoking until about ten o'clock, when he was called upon by a young man, in full evening dress, with an overcoat on his arm, and a crush hat in his hand. This gentleman had just descended in the elevator from the seventh, or top, floor; and he had dropped in upon Mr. Stratford for a few minutes' conversation before going out. He was a younger man than Stratford, moderately good-looking, somewhat slight in figure, and a little care-worn in expression. His dress was extremely correct, according to the fashion of the day; his collar was very high, and his patent-leather boots were observably pointed in the region of the toes.

Stratford was glad to see his visitor. "Will you have a pipe or cigar?" he asked.

"Neither, thank you," said the other. "I have given up smoking."

"Thorne, you astonish me!" exclaimed Stratford. "Do you find it injurious to you?"

"Oh, no," replied Mr. Thorne. "You know I never smoked very much."

"You were the most moderate smoker I ever knew," exclaimed Stratford, "with remarkably good taste in regard to tobacco, and smoking always seemed to give you so much actual pleasure."

"That is all very true," said Mr. Thorne, "but, in thinking of the matter, I have come to the conclusion that a man who goes into the society that I go into should not smoke. A cigar after dinner is sure to leave some scent upon one, and one should not carry that into a lady's drawing-room."

"If I were you," said Stratford, "I'd give up the society rather than the cigar; but I think it is not necessary to do either. I smoke as much as I like and I go into society whenever I please, and I have no reason to believe that I am found objectionable."

"It is the right thing to do," persisted Mr. Thorne. "I came to that conclusion day before yesterday, and gave up smoking from that date, with a box of cigars on my shelf that I had just opened."

Mr. Stratford made no answer, but for a few moments gazed steadily at the fire. If almost any young man of his acquaintance had told him that two days before he had given up smoking, he would have paid little attention to the statement, and would have expected to see that young man in a week or two with a cigar in his mouth. But if Arthur Thorne said he had given up this indulgence he believed that he would never smoke again.

"Going out?" presently remarked Stratford. "I should think you'd get dreadfully tired of that sort of thing."

"I do," said Mr. Thorne, "but, of course, it has to be done. Have you been buying anything lately?" he said, looking around the room.

"Nothing but experience," said Stratford, "and that is not on exhibition."

Mr. Thorne now put on his overcoat and departed. He had had nothing particular to say to Stratford, and had called merely because he considered it his duty to look in occasionally on his friend.

Mr. Arthur Thorne occupied apartments on the upper floor of this house. His rooms were not so extensive as those of Stratford, nor so richly furnished; but every detail of their appointments had been carefully studied by Thorne, and executed or arranged under his own supervision. The floors were stained a dull red, and upon them were spread Kensington rugs of the most somber green and unimpassioned yellow, mingled here and there with a streak of rusty black. The walls were clay-color; some red clay, some yellow clay, and some of an ashen-gray hue, such as you find in very poor sections of the country where farms are cheap. The doors and woodwork were also colored in various shades of mud and clay. At the windows were heavy curtains of sad browns or yellows. Some of his furniture was antique, consisting of pieces which he had "picked up" after long and anxious searches. But much of it was modern, and invariably of that class in which the construction is plainly visible. He had a large rocking-chair, the back formed of narrow rods and the bottom of a polished board. Other chairs stood up, as strong, as right-angled, and as hard as the character of the Puritans who used the chairs from which these were copied. On his mantel-piece stood a vase of white roses which had been dead a month or more, but which were kept with great care, because Mr. Thorne knew that there was a certain harmony in their tones

which they had never possessed while living. There were etchings on the walls, most of them tacked up without frames, and some with a loose corner carefully curled, so as to give the appearance of conventional ease. There were Japanese fans, but all of a subdued tone, and over the corners of pictures and by the sides of shelves hung pieces of drapery, all of them suggesting the idea that they had once been used by Arabs, and had never since been washed.

Along one side of the room was a row of bookshelves, to which easy access could be had by getting down on one's knees. These shelves were mostly filled with courses of reading, many of which Mr. Thorne had begun, and some were nearly finished. His apartments consisted of several rooms, and throughout all of these, one perceived the same harmony of tone. Nowhere was there a single touch or point of bright color to break in upon the lugubrious unison of the saddened hues which Mr. Thorne believed to be demanded by true art.

Unless it happened to be very cold or stormy, Mr. Thorne walked every morning to his office, a distance of some three miles, wearing no overcoat, and carrying a heavy cane in his hand. He was not a very strong man, and this morning exercise frequently interfered with that freshness of mind and body with which he liked to apply himself to his work, but he knew it was the right kind of thing to do, and he did it. On certain afternoons in the week he hired a horse, and rode in the park; and this he did with a serious earnestness which showed that he was conscientiously endeavoring to do his duty by his physical self. Ab-

stractly he cared little for dancing, preferring much a partner on a chair by his side to whom he could quietly talk; but he had devoted a great deal of attention and hard work to the study of the "german," believing that a knowledge of that complicated dance was essential to the education of a gentleman of his age and position in society.

To the requirements of what he believed to be the spirit of the nineteenth century, Arthur Thorne gave zealous heed. He was fond of novels and the ballads of Macaulay, but he read Spencer and Huxley and Ruskin, and was a steady student of Rosetti and Browning. The Proper, in his eyes, was a powerful policeman, leading by the collar a weeping urchin, who represented the personal inclinations of Arthur Thorne.

There were times when Mr. Stratford believed that he would yet find his hundredth man in Enoch Bullripple or in Arthur Thorne. "Neither of them," he said to himself, "has yet done anything which entitles him to preëminence among his fellows, but I believe they possess qualities which, under favoring circumstances, would send one or the other of them to that unique position, which becomes every day more interesting to me."

## CHAPTER III

HE village of Cherry Bridge was little more than a hamlet, lying on the banks of Cherry Creek, which came down from the mountains some five or six miles behind the village, and twisted itself, often very picturesquely, between the hills and through the woodlands of the lower country. Three miles from the village, between the creek and the mountain, lay the farm of Enoch Bullripple; and about four o'clock on the afternoon of a June day, Mr. Horace Stratford stood on the farm-house porch, with Mrs. People, Enoch's sister, by his side. He had arrived at the place the day before, and was now going out for his first drive. His horse, a large, well-formed chestnut, with good roadster blood in him, stood near the porch, harnessed to a comfortable vehicle for two persons. This was, apparently, an ordinary buggy, but had been constructed, with a number of improvements of Mr. Stratford's own designing, for use on the diversified surface of the country about Cherry Bridge. The equipage had been sent from the city a day or two before, but this was the first time Mrs. People had seen it in its entirety, and she gazed at it with much interest.

Mrs. People was a pleasant-faced personage of about forty-five, whose growth had seemed to incline rather more towards circumference than altitude. She was dressed neatly, but with a decided leaning towards ease in the arrangement of her garments.

"That's a better horse than you had last year, Mr. Stratford," she said; "and I expect you'll get tired of a day's driving as soon as he does. He stands well without hitchin' too; but you'd better take a tie-strap along with you to-day, for Mrs. Justin has got one of them little dust-brush dogs that seems to have been born with a spite against horses. She brought him from town with her, and he even started old Janet when I drove there last Saturday."

"Why do you think I am going to Mrs. Justin's?" asked Mr. Stratford.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. People, suddenly turning the plenitude of her countenance upon him, "you don't mean to say that you've quarreled?"

"Of course not," answered Mr. Stratford, "but it seems odd that you should take it as a matter of course that I should go there the first time I drive out."

"I'm sure I never thought of anything else," said Mrs. People; "and besides, you'll be obliged to go because I told her you were comin'. I was at the store in the village yesterday mornin', when she drove up, and says I to her, 'Mrs. Justin, you'll have another visitor to-morrow, for Mr. Stratford sent up his horse and buggy yesterday, and he'll be here himself to-night, and he'll drive over to your

house to-morrow afternoon. I'm not dead sure that he won't come in the mornin', but I don't think he will, because the afternoon is his time for goin' to see people, and not disturbin' 'em before dinner when they 're busy with their own concerns.' So, you see, she'll be expectin' you, Mr. Stratford. And, knowin' that, I never doubted you'd go."

Mr. Stratford smiled. "I shall certainly go now, Mrs. People," he said, "even if I had not intended to go before. But what did you mean when you said that Mrs. Justin would have another visitor?"

"I meant, she's got two now. They was in the carriage with her. One was a young girl, not twenty, I should say, settin' on the back seat with her. The other was a gentleman of some kind; young, I think, but I couldn't see him very well, havin' his back turned to me, lookin' at Mr. Pritchett with the hind wheel of his hay-wagon broke and a rail tied under. From the way his back moved I think he wanted to tell Mr. Pritchett what to do, but he didn't, and Mrs. Justin she said she'd be glad to see you mornin' or afternoon. And then that hare-lipped young man that David Betts has hired to help him in [illegible] came out to get her orders, and I left with[illegible] made acquainted with her company, for, of a[illegible] I think it's the meanest to stop and listen to what your neighbor is orderin' at the store, and then go about wonderin' why they don't order more of one thing, and get it cheaper, or go without some other thing, or else make it themselves at home, which, ten to one, they couldn't, not knowin' how, and even if they did

know, it would cost 'em more to make it than buy it, they knowin' their own business, anyhow, better'n anybody else."

"Well," said Mr. Stratford, going down the porch steps, "I am not sure that I am glad to hear that Mrs. Justin has strangers with her; and I shall remember what you said, Mrs. People, about tying my horse."

Mrs. Justin owned the only house in the region of Cherry Bridge which could rightly be termed a country mansion. It was spacious and handsome, surrounded by well-kept grounds, gardens, and great trees, and the prettiest part of Cherry Creek, or, as Mrs. Justin always persisted in calling it, Cherry River, flowed tranquilly at the bottom of the lawn. A mile away, on the other side of the creek, lay the farm on which John People was born, and which now belonged to Mr. Stull. The house had been remodeled and enlarged, but the Stull family had ceased to come there in the summer-time. The constantly increasing elevation of their social position rendered the fashionable watering-places much more suitable summer residences than this out-of-the-way country place, which was now leased to a farmer.

Mrs. Justin had no neighbors on whom she could depend for social intercourse. There was a clergyman at the railroad town, eight miles away, and a doctor's family in the village, and she saw a good deal of Mr. Stratford, who usually spent a portion of his summer at the Bullripple farm. But when Mrs. Justin wanted company, she invited her friends to her house, and thus, during her residence in this summer

home, she held the reins of her social relations in her own hands. She came here every year because she loved the place for its own sake, and because it was the home in which her late husband had taken such pride and delight. This husband, a good deal older than Mrs. Justin, had died some four years ago; and, although the world was now obliged to look upon Mrs. Justin as a widow, she did not consider herself in that light. To her it was as if she had married again,— married the memory of her husband,— and to this memory she was as constant as she had been to the man himself. She was still young and charming to look upon, and there had been those who had ventured to hint at the possibility that she might marry again, but the freezing sternness with which the slightest of these hints had been received had warned all who wished to continue to be her friends not to put their feet upon her sacred ground. There was not a man, who knew her well enough to like her well, who now would have dared to tell her he loved her any more than he would have dared to tell her so during the life-time of her husband.

Mrs. Justin had her life-work, in which she took a warm and enduring interest. The object of her thought and labor, especially during that part of the year which she spent in the city, was the higher education of woman; and her plans for carrying out this purpose were very effectual, but of a simple and quiet nature. She belonged to a society which did not have for its object the establishment of colleges or similar institutions for young women, but aimed solely to assist, in the most private and unobtrusive

way, those who wished to enjoy the advantages of such institutions as already existed, and were not able to do so. Many a girl who had gone through college with high honors would never have been able to touch the hem of a freshman's dress had it not been for the unseen but entirely sufficient support afforded by the association of which Mrs. Justin was the head and front.

In this enterprise Horace Stratford had long been a hearty fellow-worker, and many of its best results were due to his interest in its object, and knowledge of men and things. He had known Mrs. Justin's husband, and it was on his account that he had first come into this region; and now, for some years, he had made a home in the Bullripple house, which stood in the midst of a country which especially suited his summer moods.

Mrs. Justin and Stratford had been sitting on her piazza for about ten minutes when he remarked: "I thought you had visitors here."

"So I have," said Mrs. Justin, "but they have gone for a walk. One of them is Gay Armatt. You remember her, don't you?"

I remember the name, but not the person."

You ought to remember her," said Mrs. Justin. "I expect her to be the brightest jewel in my crown, if I ever get one. She is the girl we sent to Astley University, and she has just been graduated ahead of everybody — young men as well as her sister students."

"What are her strong points?" asked Stratford.

"Mathematics and classics," answered Mrs. Justin, and the present ambition of her life is to continue her

studies, and get the degree of Ph.D.; and, knowing her as well as I do, I believe she will succeed."

"I now remember hearing of the girl," said Stratford. "But who is your other visitor?"

"That is Mr. Crisman, to whom Gay is engaged to be married."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Stratford, "I must say the young lady does not seem to be idling away any of her time. How old is she? And was this man her fellow-student?"

"She is over twenty," said Mrs. Justin; "and Mr. Crisman is not a student at all. He is in business in the city. They have been engaged for more than a year, and will be married next winter. And now, how much more do you want to know? I see by your looks that you are not satisfied."

"I like to know as much as possible about people with whom I am going to associate," said Stratford, "and I cannot help wondering why you have those young persons here."

"Gay's family live in Maryland," said Mrs. Justin, "but I did not want her to go down there this summer. I think her relatives have an idea that she has studied enough, and I am afraid of their influence upon her. Here she will have every opportunity to work as much as anyone ought to in the summer-time; and I flatter myself that my influence will be good for her. I believe that Gay has an exceptionably fine future before her, and I don't intend to drop her until I see her enter upon it. And I couldn't invite her here without asking Mr. Crisman to come and spend his Sundays with her, and his vacation,

when he gets it, which will be in August, I think. He would have done all that if she had gone to Maryland."

"But haven't you any fears," asked Stratford, "that the girl's marriage will be an effectual extinguisher to this brilliant future that you talk of?"

"Not in the least," answered Mrs. Justin warmly. "That has all been settled. Gay and I have talked it over, and we have planned out everything. The marriage is not to interfere in the least with her studies and her future vocation in life. There is no earthly reason why it should, and I shall be very glad to see another proof in support of the fact that a woman need not remain a spinster in order to become eminent in art, science, or anything else. Here they are now." And the young couple coming up the steps of the piazza, Mr. Stratford was made acquainted with them.

After a few minutes' conversation Miss Armatt and her companion went into the house; and Mr. Stratford, as he arose to take leave of Mrs. Justin, remarked: "Did I understand you to say that girl is over twenty? She doesn't look it."

"She was nearly seventeen when I first met her, four years ago," said Mrs. Justin, "and she was then better grounded in mathematics than most students of twenty. How do you like her?"

"As far as looks go I think she is charming," said Mr. Stratford.

"And you will like her just as much in every other way," said Mrs. Justin, as she shook hands with him. "Don't forget that you are to dine with us to-morrow."

Mrs. Justin's country dinner-hour was three o'clock; and after that meal was over the next day, Stratford and Mr. Crisman sat together for an hour smoking, and talking. Mr. Crisman did most of the talking, and he told his companion a great deal about himself and his business, and also stated a good many opinions he had formed in regard to the public questions of the day. Mr. Stratford did not say much, but he smoked very steadily, and was an admirable listener.

"Well," said Crisman, when, at last, he rose and whisked away with his handkerchief some fallen ashes from his coat, "I am going to look up Miss Armatt, and see if we can't have a row on that little river, as Mrs. Justin calls it, although I should say it would have to grow a great deal before it would have a right to that name. I have got to make the most of my time, you know, as I start back to town early to-morrow morning."

"You will find the navigation of the creek rather difficult," said Mr. Stratford, "until you understand its windings and its shallows."

"Oh, I don't mind that sort of thing!" exclaimed Crisman. "If we stick fast anywhere, I'll roll up my trousers, jump out, and push her off. I'm used to roughing it."

Stratford said no more, but he noticed that shortly afterwards Miss Armatt and her *fiancé* started for a stroll in the woods, and did not go upon the water.

Early on the Monday Mr. Crisman went away to resume his weekly business career in the city; and on Tuesday morning Mr. Stratford found himself again at Mrs. Justin's house. He came this time on busi-

ness, as the lady wished to consult him in regard to some plans she was making for future work. Miss Gay, being left to her own companionship, concluded to take a walk along the shaded banks of the Cherry River. There was no doubt in her mind as to the propriety of this designation. Her affection for Mrs. Justin was so warm that if that lady had called the little stream a lake, Gay Armatt would have thought of it only as Cherry Lake.

No one who did not know Miss Gay, and who now saw her strolling by the waterside, would have connected her in his mind with differential calculus or Sophocles in the original. In coloring she somewhat resembled Mrs. Justin, having light hair and dark eyes, but there the similarity ceased, for one was somewhat tall, with the grace of a woman, and the other was somewhat short, with the grace of a girl.

Miss Gay was in a very cheery mood, as she slowly made her way under the trees and the sometimes too familiarly bending bushes which bordered the banks of the stream; and stopping now and then in some open space, where the glorious sun of June sprinkled his gold on the leaves and the water, and filled the petals of the wild flowers that moved their fragile stems in the gentle breeze with a warm purple light. She had a secret this morning; it was not much of a secret, but it was too much for her to keep to herself; she must tell it to some one or something. A little bird sat on the twig of a tree, which still swayed on account of the youthful haste with which he had alighted upon it. Gay stood still and looked at him.

"Little bird," she said, "I will tell you my secret. I must tell it to somebody, and I know it will be safe with you. This is my birthday, and I am twenty-one years old. I wouldn't tell Mrs. Justin because she would have been sure to make me a present, or do something for me on account of the day, and she has done so much for me already that I wouldn't have her do that. But I can tell you, little bird, and be quite sure that you won't think that I expect you to give me anything."

The little bird bobbed his head around and looked at her with one eye; then he bobbed it again and looked at her with the other; after which he fluffed up his breast-feathers with an air as though he would say: "So old as that! I am sure you don't look it!" And then he pressed his feathers down over the secret and flew away.

Miss Gay walked on. "This is the most charming birthday I ever had," she said. "I think it is because I feel so free, and so glad that I have got through with all that hard study. And now I am going to breathe a little before I begin again, and I want every one of you to know — birds over there on the other side of the river, butterflies on the bank, and dragon-flies skimming about over the surface of the water, yes, and even the fish which I can see whisking themselves around down there, and you, whatever you were, who flopped into the water just ahead of me without letting me see you, as if I would hurt you, you foolish thing — I want you all to know what a charming thing it is to breathe a little before you begin again; though I don't believe any of you ever do

begin again, but just keep on always with what you have to do."

And so she walked on until the stream made a sudden bend to the left, and then she took a path which led through the trees to the right, into the open fields, where she strolled over the grass and by the hedgerows, inhaling, as she went, all the tender odors of the youth of summer. Her course now turned towards the house and the farm buildings; and after clambering over a rail fence she soon saw before her a large barn-yard, in the midst of which stood a towering straw-stack, glistening in the sun. Unlatching the wide gate, she entered the yard, and stood upon the clean straw which had been spread over its surface, gazing upon the stack.

This little mountain of wheat-stalks had probably stood there all winter, but fresh straw from the barn had recently been thrown out upon it, and it looked as sweet and clean and bright as though it had just been piled up fresh from the harvest-field.

Then spoke up the happy soul of the girl, and said to her: "What a perfectly lovely straw-stack for a slide!" It had been years since Gay had slidden down a stack, but all the joys of those rapturous descents came back to her as she stood and gazed. Then her eyes began to sparkle, and the longings of youth held out their arms, and drew her towards the stack.

She looked here, and she looked there, she looked towards the barn; all the windows and doors were closed. She looked towards the fields and the house; not a person was in sight. Not a living creature did

she see, save two gray pullets scratching in a corner of the yard. It is not an easy thing to climb the slippery sides of a straw-stack, but Gay had once been proficient in the art, and her hands and feet had not lost their cunning. There was some difficult scrambling and some retrogressions, but she was full of vigor and strong intent, and she soon stood upon the summit, her cheeks and lips in fullest bloom, and her whole body beating with the warm pride of success. Her hat had fallen off in the ascent, but she tossed back her ruffled hair, and thought nothing of this mishap. She looked up to the blue sky, and out upon the green fields, and then down upon the smooth sides of the stack, which sloped beneath her.

Now a little cloud spread itself over her countenance. "Gabriella Armatt," she said to herself, "is it proper for you to slide down this stack? That was all very well when you were a girl, but think of it now." Then she thought for a moment, and the cloud passed away, and she spoke for herself: "Yes, I am really and truly a girl yet," she said, "this is my birthday and only the morning of it; I shall never have such a chance as this again, and I oughtn't to take it if it comes. Yes, I will have one slide down this stack! And that will be the very end of my existence as a girl!"

Mrs. Justin and Mr. Stratford had finished their business and were walking across the lawn towards the barn. Suddenly Stratford stopped as they were passing under the shade of a wide-spreading tree.

"Is that Miss Armatt on the top of that straw-stack?" he asked.

Mrs. Justin also stopped. "Why, surely, it is!" she said. "And how in the world did she get up there?"

"Climbed up, I suppose," said Mr. Stratford, "after the fashion of boys and girls. Doesn't she look charming standing up there in the bright sunlight?"

"Her pedestal is too insecure," said Mrs. Justin. "If she steps too much to one side or the other that straw will give way beneath her, and she will have a fall."

Mrs. Justin was just about to call out in a voice of warning, but she suddenly checked herself. At that moment Miss Gay sat down on the extreme edge of the top of the stack, and then, as a gull makes its swift downward swoop through the clear morning air to the glittering ocean crests, so Gay slid down the long side of that straw-stack from girlhood into womanhood.

As she arrived at the bottom, a mass of pink and white, and tumbled hair, Mrs. Justin ejaculated, "Well!" But Horace Stratford said nothing; and the two walked on.

## CHAPTER IV

ON the day after Gay Armatt's birthday Mr. Stratford went fishing near the foot of the mountains, and he brought back a very fair string of trout; but on the following day, which was Thursday, he drove over to Mrs. Justin's place, and found the two ladies engaged in setting up a target on the lawn, where they were going to practice archery. He received a warm welcome, for Mrs. Justin knew him as a good bowman, and he speedily took the arrangement of the target and the stringing of the bows into his own hands.

It was not long before he found that the course of studies at Miss Armatt's college had not included archery, and that, although she had a good eye and a strong arm, she knew but little of the use of the bow and arrow. Mrs. Justin was an excellent archer and needed no assistance, and although Stratford took his shots when his turn came, he gave the most of his time to the tuition of Miss Armatt. He informed her — and in a manner which seemed as if he were telling her something she had once known and now forgotten — how she must stand, how she must throw back her shoulders and advance her left foot, how she

must draw the feathered end of the arrow back to her little ear, how she must set her eye upon the target and her mind upon the arrow. Once he found it necessary to place her fingers properly around the string. But whatever he did, and whatever he told her, was done and said with such a courteous, almost deferential, manner, that the relation of teacher to pupil scarcely suggested itself. It seemed rather as if Gay and Mr. Stratford were partners in a match against Mrs. Justin, and that they were helping each other.

When he had gone, Gay Armatt expressed a high opinion of Mr. Stratford. He seemed to know so much, and was so kind, and gentle, and pleasant in his way of telling people how to do things. And to this remark Mrs. Justin answered that she knew of no one who was more of a gentleman at heart than Horace Stratford.

Whereupon Miss Gay had an idea, down at the bottom of her mind, about a certain relation that she thought would be very suitable indeed, and which gave her pleasure to think of. But nothing would have induced her to mention this idea to Mrs. Justin.

Mr. Stratford came no more to the Justin mansion until Sunday, when he staid to dinner, and spent the afternoon. Mr. Crisman was there, and he and Miss Armatt were very glad to see a visitor, for it was a rainy day, and there could be no strolling through the woods; but with some one to talk to Mrs. Justin in the library, there was no reason why the two younger people should not wander off into some other part of the house, and stay away as long as they pleased.

In the evening, however, they were all together, and Mr. Stratford, with that courtesy which was characteristic of him, yielded the floor, during the greater part of the time, to the younger man. Mrs. Justin expressed the hope that Mr. Crisman might arrange matters so that he could arrive earlier in the day when he returned on the following Saturday. In that case, they could make up a croquet party of four for the afternoon. Croquet was a game of which Mrs. Justin was very fond, although it had gone out of fashion; but Mr. Crisman put his hands in his pockets and smiled. Then he stated, with an air of not unkindly superiority, that he had but a small opinion of croquet and archery; that is, considered as recreative occupations for adults.

"If there were enough people here and in the neighborhood to get up a base-ball match," he said, "that would be something worth considering, but I rather think my grass-billiard days are over. Then, there's another thing," said Mr. Crisman, turning suddenly towards Mrs. Justin; "I sha'n't be able to come here next Saturday, anyway, for some of my friends and myself have made up a party to go on a cruise on the Sound in a yacht. You see I want to get a little sea air when I have a chance, and I shall have plenty of the mountains when I come here to spend my vacation."

"You never said anything to me of not coming next Saturday," said Gay reproachfully.

"No," said Mr. Crisman, turning to her with a smile; "I didn't want to plump it on you too soon."

Mr. Stratford now rose to go home, and Mrs. Justin went out on the piazza with him to see if there was any chance of a clear day for the morrow, thus giving Mr. Crisman an opportunity to soothe the injured feelings of Miss Gay.

The next day Stratford drove over to the railroad station, and brought back with him his friend Arthur Thorne, whom he had invited to the Bullripple farm for a week's fishing. Mr. Thorne was a very earnest worker at fishing; and indeed he always worked earnestly, whether in pursuit of pleasure or profit. On the day after his arrival he walked steadily in his wading-boots, and with his fishing accouterments, up the middle of a long trout stream. The water was very cold, and sometimes quite deep; but when Mr. Thorne did anything he did it in the right way, and he knew very well that the way to fish a trout stream was to wade up the middle of it against the current. His friend Stratford was not so thorough in his methods, and frequently did a great part of his day's fishing while standing on dry land; but for all that he generally caught all the trout that he and the Bullripple family could eat.

When towards the close of the afternoon the two friends returned to the farm-house, they found Mrs. People in a state of wild agitation. Stratford had scarcely set foot upon the porch when she took him to one side, and communicated to him the cause of her mental and physical commotion.

"I don't know how to begin to tell you, Mr. Stratford," she said, "but me an' Enoch has got to go to the city to-morrow mornin' the very earliest we can,

which is by the milk train, which leaves the station at five o'clock. Enoch got a telegraph message from John just as we was settin' down to dinner to-day, an' he sent for both of us to come to him just as soon as ever we could, which we would have done this afternoon, gettin' there after dark, to be sure, but we wouldn't 'a' minded that in times like this if it hadn't been for you and the other gentleman, who couldn't be left with nobody but Marier to cook for you an' take care of you, who isn't no more able even to set your table, let alone a-cookin' a beefsteak, an' makin' coffee as you like it, than she is to go into the pulpit an' preach; an' so, of course, we had to stay until we could see what could be done to make you an' your friend comfortable while we was away, which won't be more than three or four days, judgin' from John's message, which was a good long one, though I thought that ten words was all anybody ever sent. An' I'm sure nothin' could 'a' happened worse than havin' to go away at this time just in the very week that you have company."

"But what is the matter, Mrs. People?" said Mr. Stratford. "You haven't told me that. Has anything happened to your son?"

"Happened!" she exclaimed. "Why, I should say something had happened! Vatoldi's has been boycotted."

At this announcement Mr. Stratford manifested his surprise by laughing outright. "What utter absurdity!" he exclaimed. "And why in the world should you and your brother be called upon in an emergency of this sort?"

"John says," replied Mrs. People, "that he must instantly have somebody he can trust, an' we are the only ones. What he wants with us I don't know. But down we must go, an' no later than five o'clock to-morrow mornin' either. John knows very well that Enoch's hired man, Jim Neal, can do everything that's needed on the farm for two or three days, anyway; and I suppose he'd forgot about Marier not bein' able to cook for anybody but farm hands, and they wouldn't stand her more 'n a week at the outside, an', of course, he didn't know your friend was here. But there's no use talkin' about all that. What's to be done now is for you two gentlemen to make up your minds what you're goin' to do while we're gone."

"You need not trouble yourself about that," said Mr. Stratford, "if there is an urgent occasion for your leaving home; and I suppose there must be, though I don't understand it. Mr. Thorne and I will do very well while you are gone. We will consider that we are camping out, and what cooking Maria cannot do I can do myself. I'm a very good hand at that sort of thing."

"Not a bit of it! Not a bit of it!" exclaimed Mrs. People. "I couldn't rest easy for one minute on whatever kind of a bed John has to give me, an' I'm sure I don't know what it's goin' to be, if I thought of you here doin' your own cookin', an' with Marier greasin' your way out of this world with her lard an' her ham-fat. No, indeed; it shall never be said of me that I went off an' left you in any such a mess as that. But here comes Mrs. Justin's man, Henderson,

on horseback, an' by the looks of him he's bringin' a letter."

The man did bring a letter, and it was for Mr. Stratford, and in it Mrs. Justin gave him and his friend a very cordial and earnest invitation to stay at her house during the absence of Mrs. People and Mr. Bullripple.

"How did Mrs. Justin know anything about this?" exclaimed Stratford, when he had read the note.

"Why, you see, the way of it was this," answered Mrs. People. "As soon as Enoch an' me got over the worst of our flurry, which was mostly mine, I must say, I began to think about you an' what was to become of you while we was gone. Then I says to myself: 'Mrs. Justin ought to know about this, not as I'd ask anythin' of her, for I'm just as independent as the next person; but still, if she wants to do anythin' in a neighborly way, it isn't for me, who ever sence she first come with her husband to live here never had one word to say ag'in' her, to put myself an' my independence in the way of her doin' it.' So I jus' had the buggy hitched up, an' I drove over to her house as hard as I could go; an' 'twould have done you good, Mr. Stratford, to see how that mare did trot when I worked her up to such a state of mind that she forgot to shy at them upturned tree-roots just at our line fence, which she's done reg'lar ever sence the tree was blowed down in September of year before last. An' I told Mrs. Justin all about the thing jus' as it really stood, an' she said I needn't trouble myself about you an' the other gentleman, for she'd invite you to stay till I got back. I made up

my mind I wouldn't say nothin' about this till she sent over an' asked you, for it wasn't any of my business to interfere with her concerns, nor her way of attendin' to 'em; but I must say I felt a mighty relief when I saw that man Henderson comin' with a letter, which, of course, I knew he had an' what it was. An' now I'll be off and see about supper, or else Marier'll give you a taste of what you might have expected if you'd been left here with her to take care of you."

Stratford reflected some little time before answering Mrs. Justin's note, but then, after consulting with Thorne, and considering that the invitation was a very honest and kindly intentioned one, which should not be declined without good reason, he determined to accept it.

In the early gray of the next morning Enoch and Mrs. People took the milk train for the city, and Stratford and Mr. Thorne drove over to Mrs. Justin's house in time for breakfast.

## CHAPTER V

HERE was indeed trouble at Vatoldi's, and John People found himself in a perplexed and soul-harrowed condition. The establishment over which he presided was such a well-ordered one that everybody seemed to be surprised at the sudden changes which had taken place in this favorite resort. The employees had always been well treated and well paid, and had never shown any dissatisfaction with the rules of the establishment. But recently they had broken out in open rebellion against a fundamental regulation.

It was a cherished belief in the mind of Mr. Stull that a waiter should look like a waiter, and that his working-clothes should not be the same as those worn by gentlemen on ceremonious occasions. None of the waiters at Vatoldi's had ever made the slightest objection to their neat and appropriate costume. But a man had recently been engaged, George Bencher by name, whose soul soared above the restrictions imposed by narrow-minded authority. He made it plain to the other men that in all first-class restaurants the waiters wore dress-coats in the evening, and for him and his fellows to be attired in jackets and aprons at all hours was a visible proof that they

worked in an establishment of a low order, or else did not possess the manhood with which to assert their rights. A united demand was therefore made on John People that the waiters should thereafter be allowed to wear dress-suits in the evening, instead of jackets and aprons.

John People, of course, was not empowered to make a decision in an important case like this, nor could he say that he would refer the matter to his superiors, for, in the ordinary management of the business, he was not supposed to have any. Everybody connected with the place knew that the original Vatoldi must now be dead, and that, if John had not bought out the place, he was conducting it for the heirs. Mr. Stull had always insisted that, while John must refer to him in matters of any importance whatever, he must, at the same time, take care that no one should imagine that he was obliged to refer to anybody. Mr. Stull was most anxious that no curiosity should be aroused, and no impertinent investigations set on foot, in regard to the ownership of Vatoldi's.

Consequently, John was obliged to tell the men that he must take a little time to think over the matter, and when he went to the bank that afternoon to make his daily deposit and confer with Mr. Stull, he laid the affair before that gentleman. Mr. Stull was very indignant, and ordered John to tell the waiters that on no account would their absurd and impudent demand be complied with; so long as they served at Vatoldi's they should never wear dress-coats; and that, if they desired to adopt that style of dress, they must go somewhere else and do it. John gave the

waiters his decision that evening, and when it was received every man took off his jacket and apron, put on his ordinary coat and his hat, and departed, and the establishment closed an hour or two earlier than usual.

But John was equal to the emergency, and before the busy hours began next day he had secured, from the lists of applicants in his possession, enough waiters with whom to carry on the service. Now the war began, the offensive operations of which were directed by the energetic Bencher. Many of the newly employed waiters were frightened away, and threats of loss of reputation and ill-usage weakened the forces in the kitchen. More than this, Bencher determined to produce an impression upon the patrons of Vatoldi's, and, if possible, bring about a boycott of the place. The discontented waiters were called upon to contribute to a fund, and the money was employed in efforts to make the public believe that they should not patronize Vatoldi's. Men were hired to parade the sidewalk in front of the place, bearing banners on which were painted warning inscriptions. "Eat not at the house of the oppressor!" sounding like a text of Scripture, was expected to have much effect. Another inscription, based upon the belief in Vatoldi's decease, read thus:

"The Ghost's Restaurant
Kept By A Dead Man.
Cooking Done In The Vault."

These banner-bearers, however, with the crowds they attracted in the busy thoroughfare, were soon

driven away by the police; but the generous distribution of hundreds of copies of a circular which Bencher had composed and had had printed was found to be of great service to the cause of the boycotters. This informed the public that if they patronized Vatoldi's they might expect that the conscienceless management would be just as ready to impose bad eggs and tallow butter upon its patrons as it was to lay its vile yokes upon the necks of its employees; with much more matter of a like character.

As the authorship of these circulars could be referred to nobody in particular, and as they might be scattered by any one as he passed the place, it was difficult to prevent their distribution. People would stop to look into Vatoldi's to see what was going on, and other people stopped to see what these were looking at. Under these circumstances very few ladies came to Vatoldi's; and although a good many men persisted in taking their meals there in spite of the inferior service, the ordinary luncher or diner preferred to go to some restaurant not so prominent in public notice, and the patronage of the place fell off greatly.

The heart of Mr. Stull was filled with indignation and energetic resolve. If he could have appeared in his proper person as proprietor and manager of the boycotted establishment, he would have conducted affairs with such courage and wisdom as would have entitled him to the approbation of all good citizens. But it was simply impossible for him to make up his mind to avow himself the owner of Vatoldi's. His pride in the high position which he held in social and

financial circles would never allow him to admit, even in such a crisis as this, that his fortune in any way depended upon his ability as a restaurant-keeper. Social standing was dearer to him even than money, and he would much have preferred to see Vatoldi's deserted by its patrons for a month, or even a year, than to see himself and his family deserted by "Society."

But he did not intend that Vatoldi's should be deserted. He could do nothing openly; but indirectly as a patron of the place, and as an earnest defender of the right of man to carry on a legitimate business in his own way, he did a great deal. He took all his meals at the place, and induced many of his friends to go there. He urged them to do this for the "principle of the thing," although he did not hesitate to say that he should be very sorry to see this establishment, the best of its kind in the city, come to grief. He took his wife and three daughters to Vatoldi's for luncheon and also for dinner, and both his carriage and his coupé were kept standing as long as possible before the door.

When John People came to him at the usual hour, Mr. Stull fairly loaded him with injunctions and directions. If anything very important occurred, John was to telegraph to him at bank or residence, in a simple cipher, of which Mr. Stull prepared two copies; and the faithful manager was ordered, whenever his employer went up to the desk to pay his bill, to give him with his change a brief report of the state of affairs up to that time. It was at this conference that it was agreed that Mr. Bullripple and

Mrs. People should be sent for. It was quite obvious that in this emergency John must have some assistants in whom he could trust; and although his mother and his uncle knew nothing of restaurant-keeping, they were persons of varied abilities and much energy, and he felt that he knew no one else in whom he could place a like confidence. Mr. Stull was acquainted with the old farmer and his sister, and while they were not the people whom he would have decided to call upon, had he had a choice, he knew that they were honest and devoted to John; and these points decided him to authorize John to call upon them.

Mr. Bullripple and Mrs. People arrived at Vatoldi's about eleven o'clock on the second day of the boycott — an hour of the morning at which, even on ordinary occasions, there were comparatively few customers in the place. John expected them by this train, and knowing that the meeting with his parent would not be an exhibition suitable for the public eye, he had retired at the proper moment to a small back room used as a storage pantry; and it was there that his mother enfolded him in her arms, and assured him with streaming eyes that she would stand by him to the last bone in her body.

When the emotions of Mrs. People had been somewhat quieted, and Enoch Bullripple had taken his nephew by the hand and had inquired what was the trouble, and what John wanted him to do, they all sat down at a table in the corner of the large room, and everything was explained. Mrs. People was very

anxious to know what Mr. Vatoldi thought about it all, but John evaded her questions.

"Everything is left to me," he said. "The proprietor is away and cannot come here, and I must manage the whole affair myself; and I think I can get through all right if you two will stay here for a few days until things come straight again."

"We'll stay, John," said his mother, "just as long as you need us. You may depend on that."

"That's so," added the old man. "We'll stick to you till the place is either shut up or running along as it used to. Now, do you want me to carve or wash dishes?"

It did not take long for John to explain what he wanted his new assistants to do. His mother was to go into the kitchen. The head cook had been induced to follow the waiters, and although the assistants who remained were moderately skilled in their duties, they could not be trusted to work without supervision. Mr. Bullripple was to keep a general eye upon the dining-room, and when John was out was to preside at the cashier's desk. He was not quick at making change, but he could do so with great accuracy, having a very sharp eye for a penny.

Enoch Bullripple had not always been a farmer. Although country-bred, he had at one time kept a small grocery store in the eastern part of the city, and after that he had made a voyage to the West Indies, during which his speculations in early cabbages and potatoes had proved very profitable to him. The head, arms, and legs of Mr. Bullripple were very hard,

and his movements and his wits were quick. He was not ignorant of the ways of the town, and was one of those countrymen against whom town dealers are much more likely to endeavor to defend themselves than to try to impose upon them. He entered with much interest into the new line of business now open to him at Vatoldi's. He was very willing to give his nephew all the assistance in his power, but he also had a strong desire to make use of the opportunities that might now be afforded him to find out what was that nephew's true position in the establishment. If Vatoldi were dead, as he had reason to believe, could it be possible that John was now the real proprietor? In that case, what became of the very large profits which must accrue from the business? But if John were merely acting as the agent of some one else, who was that some one else? This was the question to which Enoch gave his attention, for he did not believe that John was actually at the head of affairs. He was quite sure that there was a proprietor and general director in the background, and he was quite as sure that this person desired to remain very much in the background. It was not merely curiosity which prompted Enoch to discover the unknown owner and his motives for secrecy. He believed that his nephew was carrying a very heavy load with but very little profit to himself, and that if he, Enoch, could get one of his strong thumbs into the Vatoldi pie, he would be able to pull out a plum for John.

Mr. Bullripple walked up and down between the rows of tables in the long room, sometimes taking his seat on an empty chair, of which, on this day, there

were a good many. He kept his eyes on the new waiters who had been employed, looking sharply for signs of disaffection and intimidation. Now and then he stepped to the door to see if he could discover any of those banners of which he had been told, and several times he made a sudden swoop out upon the sidewalk, and in the direction of a boy who was distributing circulars of the boycotters. He never caught the boy, but he picked up a great many circulars, and carried them in to be burned.

A little before three o'clock John asked his uncle to take his place at the cashier's desk,— a good deal of a sinecure just then,— as he was obliged to go to the bank and make his deposits.

"Can't I go for you?" asked his uncle.

"Oh, no," said John; "I always do that myself."

The rest of the afternoon and evening passed disagreeably at Vatoldi's. As night drew on, a crowd of idlers, apparently sent there for the purpose of making the ordinary public believe that something was going to happen, stood, dispersed, and reassembled upon the sidewalk. Sometimes rough fellows would come in and demand something to drink, without anything to eat, and when told that refreshments were not served here in that fashion, would complain violently, and would go away with loud words of derision and contempt. Nearly every one who passed the place seemed to carry in his hand one of Bencher's circulars; and when, in the course of the evening, Mr. Stull and his friends, with other gentlemen who had determined to patronize on principle this persecuted restaurant, came in, nearly all of them ordered

something or other which John had thought would not be called for in these troublous times, and which, therefore, was not on hand. If Mr. Stull said anything to John when he went up to the cashier's desk, it must have been spoken very quickly, and in an undertone, for no one noticed it. But, as he walked away, Mr. Stull's face was very red, while John's seemed troubled. At the close of the day several of the newly engaged waiters informed Mr. People that they would like to have their money for their day's work, and that they should not return. They had not understood the state of affairs when they agreed to come there, and they did not wish to mix themselves up in any such trouble. Of course no one of them said anything about the private note he had received that day from Bencher.

John had secured rooms for his mother and uncle in the boarding-house where he lived; and after the young man had taken his weary body and soul to bed, the two elders had a little confabulation in the parlor.

"If this thing goes on much longer," said Mrs. People, "it will bring that boy to his dying bed. He's pretty nigh worn out now."

"That's so," replied Enoch; "John is mighty stout on his pins, but he looks shaky for all that."

"Pins are no good," said his sister, "no matter how fat they may be, when the mind is so troubled and tossed it can't sleep. An' just look at that Vatoldi!"

"I wish I could," said Enoch, "but I don't expect to."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. People; "it's easy enough to see that he's goin' to keep himself out of harm's

way, an' trouble's way too, an' leave my boy to bear everything. I tell you what let's do, Enoch. Let's shut the place up, an' take John away. Then, if Vatoldi wants to open it again, let him come an' open it."

"That wouldn't do, Hannah; that wouldn't do," said Enoch. "If the reg'lar customers, like Mr. Stull and all them carriage people, was to find the place shut up, they'd go somewhere else, and not come back again. It won't do to spile a good business that way."

"It's a long time sence John has had a holiday," said Mrs. People, after a little pause, "an' he's always told me he couldn't have one, because there was nobody to take his place while he was gone. Now it strikes me that this is just the time for John to get his holiday. Here's you an' me on hand to be in his place; an' as long as the restaurant's boycotted there won't be much to do, an' what little business there is, you an' me can attend to well enough without John."

"That's a good idea, Hannah," said Enoch, "a very good idea. As long as the business is upset, and hind-part foremost, and standing on its head, I can do what marketing is needed, and boss the waiters. But if everything was a-runnin' on as smooth and even as the fly-wheel of a steam-engine, with hundreds of people comin' in, and eatin' and drinkin', and never seein' nothin' to find fault with, then you and me would get the whole machinery out of order, because we don't understand it, and John, or somebody like him, would have to be on hand. But now we can go into this rough-and-tumble business as

well as anybody, and keep things as straight as they can be kept till that lot of stupid waiters see which side their bread is buttered, and come back. Then John can take hold again, and everything go on as it used to. You're right, Hannah. This is the time for John's holiday, if he's ever goin' to get one."

"But he's got to get it!" said Mrs. People, her emotion lifting her to her feet. "I know he'll say he can't an' he won't. But that's not goin' to make any difference with me. I'm determined he shall have a rest. Why, when he went off to bed jus' now he was about able to get upstairs, an' no more."

Enoch Bullripple had much more faith in the enduring powers of John than had been expressed by Mrs. People, but for more reasons than one he greatly desired that the young man should have a holiday. If he, Enoch, should be left in charge of Vatoldi's for a few days, he felt sure that he could get at the bottom of the mystery of the proprietorship.

"But, Hannah," said he, "I really don't see how it's goin' to be done."

"I don't neither," said Mrs. People, "but it's got to be done, an' that's the long an' the short of it."

## CHAPTER VI

HE two gentlemen, whose residence at the Bullripple farm had been interrupted by the boycott at Vatoldi's, found the life at Mrs. Justin's house a very pleasant one. Mr. Thorne, having come into the mountains to fish, fished; and his friend Stratford usually went with him on his excursions. In the evening this family of four adapted itself very well to cards, conversation, or twilight strolls, and the ladies found fault with Mr. Thorne because he worked so hard at his fishing, and gave none of his daytime to pursuits in which they could take part. But he was a thoroughly conscientious young man, and as he came to the mountains to fish, he fished.

As his friend now began to know the country, Mr. Stratford frequently left him to wade the cold trout streams alone, while he gave some of his time to the entertainment of the ladies. One afternoon he took them, with the Justin horses and carriage, on a long drive through some of the valley roads. On the next day he did not go out with Mr. Thorne at all, as Mrs. Justin desired his opinion on a business letter she had received from some of her fellow-workers; and in the afternoon, Mrs. Justin having retired to the library

to compose her answer, Stratford proposed to Miss Armatt that she should go in a boat on Cherry Creek, and investigate the beauty of that winding stream.

"Why, I thought the Cherry River, as I shall call it, was not navigable," said Miss Gay. "When Mr. Crisman and I wanted to go rowing, Mrs. Justin told us that it was so full of sand-bars and snags and all sorts of obstructions, that boating on it was not to be thought of."

"She was entirely right," pursued Stratford; "that is, when speaking of persons not familiar with the peculiarities of the stream. It would be extremely awkward and perhaps dangerous for you and Mr. Crisman to essay boating here. But in this case it is different. I have lived here a great deal, and have made myself perfectly acquainted with the eccentricities of the river, or creek. Suppose you come and let us see what progress we can make."

"Oh, I shall be delighted," said Gay. And, tossing on her hat, she walked with Stratford to the waterside.

In rowing of the sort that was required here Stratford was an adept. With Miss Gay in the stern of the boat, and himself placed moderately well forward, so that the flat-bottomed craft should draw as little water as possible, he rowed rapidly over the deeper and open places, pulled close to one bank to avoid the shallows by the other, crushed steadily through beds of lily-pads, and once slowly and gently pushed the boat beneath the trunk of a tree which spanned the stream, keeping his eyes meantime on Gay to see that her head and shoulders were bent low enough to prevent contact with the rough overhanging bark.

As they went on, the stream became wider and deeper, and they met with fewer impediments; and it was not long before, to Miss Armatt's great delight, Stratford turned the boat into a narrow tributary stream, which, running through the heart of the woods, presented to the eye a lovely water-avenue, passing under overhanging arches of green leaves, mossy branches, and down-reaching vines. This little stream, though narrow, was deeper and much more open to the approaches of a little boat than the upper part of Cherry Creek, and for ten or fifteen minutes Stratford rowed quite steadily, keeping his head the meanwhile turned well to one side so that he should not run into either of the banks.

Then he stopped, and, drawing in the oars, said: "Now I'll rest for a time and look about me."

"You'll see nothing," exclaimed Miss Gay with sparkling eyes, "that is not perfectly lovely."

Stratford looked about him and perceived that she was quite correct. Here and there was a break in the green roof above them, and the sunlight falling in little dapples on leaf and water enhanced the beauty of the shaded vernal hues with which the scene was mainly tinged. On one bank a matted grape-vine bent down so low and wide that it formed a spreading bower over the water, under which a little boat might gently lie. On either side there were glimpses of forest beauty; beyond them, the little stream twinkled and rippled into the far-away heart of the woods, and the perfume from the young blossoms of the grape-vines filled all the air.

Miss Gay sat silent, her eyes wandering from side

to side, and resting at last upon the water-bower formed by the spreading vines. Then she said: "I think I must try and remember all the twists and turns we made in coming here, so that sometime I can guide Mr. Crisman to this spot. I don't believe he was ever in such a charming place."

Stratford looked into the face of Miss Gay, and across the clear blue sky of her delight he saw floating a thin gray cloud. He knew that she was thinking what a little heaven this would be if it were her lover who was with her. But Stratford had not brought Miss Armatt here that she might tell herself how delightful it would be to sit in a boat with Mr. Crisman under that roof of odorous vines. He wanted to talk to her of herself, and this he now set about to do.

He answered her remark by saying that she would have to come over this course a good many times before she would be able to act as guide for any one else. He made no offer to be her instructor in navigation, but began to question her on the subject of her past studies and those victories in the field of learning which she still hoped to achieve. He made her understand how greatly interested he was in the objects of Mrs. Justin's life-work; and having heard from that lady so much of Miss Armatt, he wished to talk to her about what she had done and what she intended to do.

Miss Gay was very willing to talk of these matters. She had learned from Mrs. Justin that Mr. Stratford was a man whose experience and knowledge were

very great, and whose opinions were of the highest value, and she much desired to have his advice about her future studies.

But very little advice she received on this occasion. Mr. Stratford wished to look into her mind, and not to exhibit his own. Miss Gay found it very easy to talk to her companion. He seemed to want to know exactly those things which she most wished to tell him. In ten minutes she was speaking more freely of her aspirations and half-matured plans than she had ever spoken to any one before. Mrs. Justin was her dear, kind friend, and always willing to listen and assist. But Gay had perceived that there was not a perfect sympathy between them when they talked of her future intentions. Mrs. Justin wished her young friend to climb, and climb boldly, but the spot at which she would have been willing to rest content was far below the altitude on which Gay Armatt had fixed her eyes and her hopes. But there was one who not only sympathized with her in her longings, but, by his questions and his hearty interest, led her on to bring forth ideas and plans which had long been laid away in her mind because there was no one to whom she could show them. She expected to talk about all these things to Mr. Crisman after they were married; but just now their conversation never ran upon intellectual or educational topics. There were always things of a totally different sort which he wished to say to her.

But now, side by side with this courteous gentleman, this scholar and careful thinker, she walked in

the regions of high thought and far-spread prospects; and when the sun had sunk so low that it no longer threw its light upon the leaves and water, and Stratford took up the oars and said it was time for them to return, he looked into her face, and on the sky of her delight there was no cloud.

Gay told Mrs. Justin all about this most delightful little excursion, and hesitated not at the same time to give vent to her high admiration of Mr. Stratford.

"It is a pity," said Mrs. Justin, "that Mr. Crisman could not have rowed you into this woodland stream."

"It would have been perfectly lovely," exclaimed Miss Gay, "if he could have been with me! But then," she added, "I should have lost that most encouraging conversation with Mr. Stratford."

The next afternoon Mr. Thorne was prevailed upon to stay at home and take part in Mrs. Justin's favorite outdoor amusement, a game of croquet. Thorne was a kind-hearted man, and as willing as anybody to aid in the work of making other people happy, provided such labor did not interfere with the things which he really ought to do. But now he felt that he had done his duty in the trout streams, and that, having come into the mountains to fish, he had fished. Therefore, a four-handed game of croquet was made up.

"Gay and Mr. Thorne will play together," said Mrs. Justin, "leaving you and me for the other side."

Stratford smiled. "That will be a most agreeable arrangement for me," he said, "but I am rather sorry for Miss Armatt and Thorne."

"That is true," said Mrs. Justin. "I remember now that Gay said she had not had a mallet in her hand

since she was a little girl; and you and I are both good players."

"Thorne tells me he knows but little of the game," said Stratford. "Shall I take him on my side and coach him?"

"Of course not," answered Mrs. Justin. "We won't divide in that way. You must take Gay, and I will play with Mr. Thorne."

The game proved to be a very long one, for both Mrs. Justin and Stratford were good shots and excellent managers, and they so harassed each other that advantages on either side were slowly gained. But for Gay the game was none too long. She was surprised to find that croquet, which she had supposed to be a thing of bygone days, relegated now to children and very old-fashioned grown people, was really an interesting and absorbing exercise, in which many powers of the mind, not omitting those of a mathematical nature, were brought into vigorous play. Every shot she made, every position she took, and even her manner of standing and holding her mallet were directed by Mr. Stratford; and the pleasure of doing these things properly, and of feeling that every effort had its due value, helped very much to give the game its zest. She and her partner won, and this was not because Mr. Stratford was a better player than Mrs. Justin, or that Gay knew more of the game than Mr. Thorne, but because the younger lady subordinated herself entirely to Stratford. They moved through the game as one player, neither advancing far beyond the other, and at length side by side going out of it. Mrs. Justin did not demand such subjec-

tion from her partner. She thought that sometimes he ought to rely on himself, and when he did so she generally found that he had left little on which she could rely.

As they walked towards the house, Gay Armatt said to Mrs. Justin: "I believe Mr. Stratford would make a splendid teacher. I think he ought not to deprive the world of the benefit of his extraordinary talents in that way."

"I know Mr. Stratford has not the slightest desire," answered Mrs. Justin, "to act as teacher to the world," placing a slight emphasis on the collective noun.

Whether Stratford liked teaching or not, he and Miss Gay spent more than an hour the next morning on the back piazza of the house, with four large books from the library and an ancient atlas.

"May I ask," said Mrs. Justin, when she came out to them, "what you two have found to keep you here all the morning?"

"We haven't been here all the morning," said Stratford, "and we have been visiting some of the head springs of literature, and tracing the meanderings of their streams."

"You can't imagine," cried Miss Gay, "how interesting it has been! But I had no idea," looking at her watch, "that it was nearly twelve o'clock, and I have two letters to write before you send to the post-office!"

Gay ran into the house, and Mrs. Justin took her place in the chair by Stratford. "It is a pity," she said, after glancing a few moments over the atlas,

"that Mr. Crisman chose to take his yachting expedition just now. It would be so much more pleasant for him to be here while you two gentlemen are in the house. I heard from Mrs. People this morning, and she says she will not be able to return home until after next Sunday at the earliest."

Mr. Stratford looked at his companion with a very small twinkle in his eye, but with a grave face. "You think," he said, "that Mr. Crisman ought to be here while we are here?"

"I cannot but believe," she said, looking steadily at Stratford, "that it would be better for his interests."

"And how about Miss Armatt's interests?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" said the lady, quickly.

"Mrs. Justin," said Stratford, closing the atlas and leaning forward as he spoke, "I mean this: Miss Armatt is a young woman in whom I have taken an extraordinary interest."

"It is scarcely necessary to mention that," remarked Mrs. Justin.

"You should not be surprised," said he, "at my interest in her, for you have the same feeling yourself. You know she is a girl with an exceptional future open to her, and you would do anything in your power to help her. I am of the same mind. I believe that I comprehend very clearly her present condition of intellectual development; and I see, too, in what directions her inclinations will lead her in regard to her future work. I think her views are not exactly sound. She needs something more than her

college and her text-books can give her; and I very much hope that I shall be able to bring her to look upon literature, philosophy, and science with the eye of an untrammeled thinker. This she ought to do before she takes another step forward. And I honestly admit to you, Mrs. Justin, that I am very glad to have the opportunity, uninterrupted by Mr. Crisman's weekly visit, to do what I can to assist in the cutting and polishing of this jewel in your crown."

"You know, Mr. Stratford," said Mrs. Justin, "that I expected you to take an interest in Gay, and that I should have been very much disappointed if you had not done so; but I did not expect that she would take such a deep and absorbing interest in you."

"I cannot say," answered Stratford after a moment's pause, "that I am sorry to hear that; because if she is interested in me she will be the more likely to give an earnest attention to what I say."

"Horace Stratford," said Mrs. Justin, "did anybody ever turn you the least bit to the right or the left?"

"Yes," he answered. "Here is this young creature, with the mind of a philosopher and the heart of a girl, who has turned me entirely aside from what I thought I was going to do when I came down here."

"It is just that girl-heart which troubles me," thought Mrs. Justin. But she did not deem it proper to speak her thought. Gay Armatt was engaged to be married, and what had she or Mr. Stratford to do with her girl-heart? So she continued not this conversation; but, after gazing a moment at the vines upon the lattice-work beside her, she looked over the lawn.

"What has Mr. Thorne been doing with himself this morning?" she asked. "He is now sitting alone, down there on the bench by the bank. I think he has been outrageously neglected."

"I can't agree with you," said Stratford, "for immediately after breakfast he started out on some sort of pedestrian expedition, without saying anything to me about it. I knew nothing of his intention until I saw him marching away over the hills. He is an odd fellow, and I suppose he thought it was his duty, on a fine morning like this, to walk."

"Mr. Thorne is very conscientious, is he not?" asked Mrs. Justin.

"He is entirely too conscientious."

"How can any one be too conscientious?" asked the lady with some warmth.

"It is quite possible," answered Stratford. "Arthur Thorne has an abnormal conscience. He has cultivated it so carefully that I believe it has grown to be a thing which overshadows his life. Now, I prefer for myself a conscience which is pruned down to healthy and vigorous growth."

"And who does the pruning?" asked Mrs. Justin.

"I do," answered Stratford with a smile. And then he went down to join Mr. Thorne upon the lawn.

"Why did you start off this morning without saying anything to me about it?" asked Stratford, as he took a seat by his friend.

Mr. Thorne smiled. "I thought," he said, "that if I asked you, politeness might impel you to go with me; and as I saw Miss Armatt alone with her books

on the piazza, I knew where your chosen place would be. Would it be stepping outside of the privileges of friendship if I were to offer you my congratulations, together with my most unqualified commendation?"

"My dear Thorne," exclaimed Stratford, "your reason has taken grasshopper legs unto itself, and has jumped most wildly! Let us speak plainly. Do you suppose I am making love to Miss Armatt?"

"I supposed," said Thorne, "from the general tone of your intercourse with the young lady, that the preliminary stage of love-making had been passed, and that you were engaged."

"You amaze me!" cried Stratford. "There is nothing whatever of that sort between me and Miss Armatt! I never saw her until I came up here, about two weeks ago. I am exceedingly interested in her studies and in her prospects, and that is the basis of our intimacy."

"I shall not ask your pardon," said Mr. Thorne, "for the mistake was a compliment to your taste and good sense. I used to think that Mrs. Justin, without question, was the most charming woman of my acquaintance; but since I have seen Miss Armatt, I have revolved the matter somewhat in my mind. In fact, that was what I was doing just now when you came."

"A most profitless revolution," remarked Stratford.

As the two men walked together towards the house, it occurred to Stratford that he had not mentioned to his friend that Miss Armatt was indeed engaged to be married, though not to himself. But the subject of Mr. Crisman was not agreeable to him, and he did

not care to discuss it; therefore he said nothing about it.

That afternoon Arthur Thorne took Miss Armatt to drive in his friend Stratford's buggy. Arthur had taken lessons in driving from a professional, and he was the only man with whom Stratford would trust his horse. Mrs. Justin did not say to herself that Mr. Thorne was the only man with whom she would trust Gay, but she was very willing to have him go with her, his abnormal conscience not appearing as a fault in her eyes. It was not, perhaps, entirely suitable that Gay should go driving with any young man other than her engaged lover; but, as Mr. Crisman chose to stay away, Mrs. Justin did not feel inclined to shut up her young friend on that account.

As for Gay herself, she went very willingly with Mr. Thorne, but she could not help feeling a little disappointed that it had not been Mr. Stratford who had asked her. Several times during the drive, which was a long and interesting one, she was employed in making mental comparisons between Mr. Stratford and Mr. Thorne, at moments when the latter thought she was absorbed in contemplation of the landscape. And yet she liked Mr. Thorne very much, and would probably like him better when she knew him better. There was here none of that fire-and-wax sympathy which had shown itself in the early stages of her acquaintance with Mr. Stratford. Mr. Thorne spoke but little on those subjects in which her mind was most deeply interested, and what he did say was not at all what Mr. Stratford would have said. But she felt, when she returned from her

drive, that she had spent the afternoon with one who was truly a gentleman. Mr. Thorne had done nothing which was peculiarly adapted to produce this impression, but the impression had been produced; and Gay Armatt could not help thinking that it was a very pleasant thing to be in the company of persons who were truly gentlemen.

But, in her thoughts, Gay instituted no comparisons between Mr. Crisman and other men. Other men were other men, and had their faults and their merits. But Mr. Crisman was in a different sphere altogether; he was her lover, and she was to marry him; and with him criticism and comparison had nothing to do.

## CHAPTER VII

R. ENOCH BULLRIPPLE lay in his bed, in his room at his lodging-house, and gazed steadily at a large lithographic picture of the death-bed of Jonathan Edwards which hung on the wall opposite to him. This work of art was moderately lighted by a cluster of electric lamps, which, half a mile from his window, was suspended two hundred feet in the air for the all-night lighting of the city park and its surrounding bedrooms. He thought nothing of the expiring theologian, but he was thinking very earnestly and actively of the conversation he had just had with his sister in regard to the expediency of bringing about a holiday for his nephew, John. Enoch would have been very glad to do this solely for the sake of the young man, who truly needed rest and recreation; but he was much more willing to do it for his own sake. He greatly desired to have the opportunity to institute an inquisition into the constitution of the Vatoldi establishment, and this he believed could be done only in John's absence. In devising and discarding this plan and that for getting rid of John for a few days, Mr. Bullripple fell asleep.

In another room of the lodging-house lay Mrs. People, gazing at a steel engraving of a hunter returning from the chase, surrounded by piles of dead game, the transportation of which could only be accounted for by supposing that he coaxed the various creatures to his doorstep and there dispatched them. But Mrs. People thought not of the hunter or his victims; her mind was fixed upon the necessity of getting John off for a holiday before old Vatoldi came in from the country, or wherever it was that he was staying. In devising and discarding plans for this purpose she fell asleep.

Very early the next day this worthy brother and sister, each utterly planless, and somewhat dejected on that account, made their way to Vatoldi's, where, of course, they took their meals. Enoch was much the faster walker, and, partly because she was tired keeping up with him, and partly because she wanted an apple, a fruit that was not to be had at Vatoldi's at that season, she stopped at the stand of Dennis Roon, where she had bought apples before, and had thus formed a slight acquaintance with the proprietor.

Mr. Roon was an apple-stand keeper of prominence; in fact, his stand, which was at the corner of two busy streets, not far from Vatoldi's, was, from a certain point of view, the most important place of business in the neighborhood. This point of view was Dennis Roon's point of view. Nothing could be so important in the eyes of himself and his family as that the stand should be opened at the proper time in the morning; that certain apples should be rubbed and placed in one compartment; that certain other

apples should be rubbed and placed in another compartment; that this bunch of bananas should be turned this way, and that bunch should be turned the other way; and that just so many oranges should be kept in a corner box where they would attract the attention of people coming from different directions. These matters, with many others, such as the probable relation of the weather to the day's trade, or the varied arrangements of the little awning, so that keeping off the sunshine should not interfere too much with the attraction of purchasers, were discussed with as much earnestness and warmth by Dennis, his wife and son and oldest daughter, as if they had been questions of Home Rule or Pan-Electricity.

Dennis was a strong-built, black-bearded man, loaded and crammed, from the crown of his head to the heel of his foot, with active vitality. He was never still so long as there was anything to do, and never silent so long as there was anybody to speak to. In connection with his stand he carried on the business of boot-blacking, and two arm-chairs, one on each street, were always ready for customers. The son and heir, with shirt-sleeves of the same blue flannel spotted with white of which his father's sleeves were made, was the boot-black; but when occasion required, Dennis would dash from boots to apples and from apples to boots with astonishing readiness and celerity. In the earliest hours of street pedestrianism his stand was open, and his wares remained on view and sale until after midnight. Even on Sundays the business went on, and the halo of importance hung over

the stand. If on a fine Sunday one of Dennis's customers, dressed in his best clothes and smoking the cigar in which he always indulged of a Sunday morning, came from his house with an air of leisurely independence to buy his Sunday paper and have his boots blacked, and chanced to bring his little girl along with him, it was ten, or even eleven, to one that Dennis gave that little girl an apple, selecting the fruit from a box in the lower part of the stand. This apple would be specked, and not one which the customer would have bought had he been buying apples; but, as it was a present to his child, he walked away with that feeling of elevated satisfaction which is caused by the reception of presents which we feel are tributes to the value of our patronage.

Mrs. People selected a well-preserved red apple from the stand, and then she said:

"It seems to me it is very late for apples. In our part of the country they were gone long ago. Where do these come from?"

"From the market down town," answered Dennis; "but where the trees grow I niver heard. But ye can always thrust to there bein' apples all the year round. The old ones always waits till the new ones cooms."

"That's very different from what it is up our way," said Mrs. People, "but it's a lucky thing that city folks have something to console themselves with. I've barely been here two days yet, and I'm hankerin' for home."

"You're havin' a hard time there at Vatoldi's, mum," said Dennis, who knew all about the boycott,

and had taken a great interest in its progress; "and if ye'd coom to town when things was smoother ye'd a liked it better. And ain't there no signs of them blockheads coomin' back to work and givin' up their coat-tails? If I was Misther People that kapes the place, I'd break the head of ivery one of 'em that said 'tail' to me."

"Mr. People is my son, sir, and he don't keep the place himself, which I wish he did, because then I'd make him give it up, and come home, and go to farmin', like his father before him. But here he is, wearin' himself out, and killin' himself, for somebody else. For, as I said to him yesterday, 'it's no difference to you, John, whether they wear jackets or coat-tails; and if I was you, I'd just go home and rest for a spell while there is so little doin', and let old Vatoldi come down and settle the business with the waiters himself.'"

"I thought that man was dead, mum," said Dennis.

"He isn't dead a bit," answered Mrs. People. "He's livin' up the North River somewhere, either at Yonkers or Newburgh; at least, that's what I take it to be from what John tells me, though he never named either of them towns. And then, as I was sayin', if John could be got off into the country,—and he's not had a decent rest for nigh on to two years,—the old man would have to come down; and then me and my brother — that's Mr. Bullripple — could go home too."

Dennis paused in the removal of the wrapping from an orange he held in his hand, and turned towards Mrs. People. "It's my opinion, mum," he said, "that

you've pitched your hat right into the middle of that boycott business, and if you go there to pick it up, you'll see things just as they is. As like as not, them waiters is more set agin your son, mum, than they would be agin anybody else, because he's the one that won't let 'em have their coat-tails. Now, if he was to go away, and let the head boss coom and talk to them, he might be able to sthraighten things out quicker than Misther People could do it. Though I must say, mum, that I'd feel like warmin' their jackets for 'em afther they put 'em on."

"But we can't get him to go," said Mrs. People, who had half eaten her apple. "He won't listen to it."

"If ye could make him see, mum," said Mr. Roon, "that it wasn't on'y for the good of his hilth, but for the good of the business, perhaps he'd go."

"It's no use," said Mrs. People, shaking her head. "Me and his uncle has talked and talked to him, but you might as well try to push down a lamp-post as to move John."

"There is them, mum," said Dennis, "which if they won't move for their own good, must be moved by their frinds. And that brings to me moind the case of me sister-in-law, Missis Follory. She was very bad with the consumption, mum, most part of her lungs bein' gone, and the rest just like wood for hardness; and the doctor said she ought to go to Cuby, and breathe sugar."

"Breathe what?" exclaimed Mrs. People.

"They go into the houses where they make sugar, mum, and the air is all full of sugar and melasses,

and they breathe that, and it ayther makes their lungs grow agin, or softens 'em, I niver knew which; but it's good for consumption. And that's what the doctor said she must do. But niver an inch would Missis Follory budge, though all her frinds and relations got afther her and towld her that she was just murtherin' herself to sit there a-sewin' and conthractin' her chist whin she might as well be recoverin' her hilth, a-breathin' sugar and melasses, and, perhaps, a little bit of Jamaiky rum, too, for I don't see how they can keep that out of the air any more'n the ither things; and Mike Follory, her husband, who married her afther me brother died, towld her it ud be just as chape to go down there and get well, and be able to take in washin' like she used to, as to stay here and be dyin' for nobody knows how long. And Missis McGee, she offered to board him for two dollars a week till his wife come home, all for the love she bore Missis Follory. But niver an inch would Missis Follory budge. Then her frinds and relations they put their heads togither, and they says, 'She's got to go!' And, all unbeknownst to her, Mike he bought her a ticket in a ship that was sailin' for Cuby. And then he says to her, 'If you won't go to the West Injees to get back your lungs, perhaps you won't moind takin' a sail on the bay with me and Misther Roon,' which is me, mum. And she didn't moind, and she wint. And when she got outside the bar the ship joggled her a good deal, and Misther Follory and me we towld her she'd better go down-stairs and lie down till the ship turned roond to coom back, which she did. Then me and Misther Follory we got

into the poilot-boat and coom home. And Missis Follory she got sicker an' sicker till she died on the second day of the v'yage. But it was saysickness she died of, mum, and not consumption. She'd got well of that if she'd only once set foot in Cuby. And Misther Follory he married Missis McGee. So you see, mum, there's a way for makin' people do things for their own good, as won't do 'em without bein' made. And if I was you, mum, I'd go to my son, mum, and I'd say, 'John, Misther Roon, as keeps the apple-stand, has just towld me that there's a stamer down the East River that's goin' to sail for some of them down south places this afthernoon, which the steward of brings bananas to Misther Roon every thrip; and if I was you, I'd go down south in that stamer and buy a lot of chape cabbages and pittaties, and coom back and foind the waiters all workin' paceable in their jackets, and sell the pittaties and cabbages to the boss.'"

"That would be very nice," said Mrs. People, throwing away the core of her apple, "but I wouldn't want my son John to die in two days of seasickness. And I don't believe he'd go, anyway. But I must hurry on, Mr. Roon. I am much obliged to you for your story, though it's a great pity that your sister-in-law died, and everybody in the kitchen may be boycotted by this time, for all I know."

"Ye need niver be afraid of your son dyin' with saysickness," shouted Dennis after her, "for he's got a moighty different koind of a set-up from what Missis Follory had."

When Mrs. People reached Vatoldi's she did not

immediately see John, but she explained to Enoch her delay by recounting to him, with all its details, her conversation with Mr. Roon.

Somewhat to her surprise, Mr. Bullripple listened to her with patience, and even interest, and when she had finished said: "Now, don't say a word to John about this till you and me has had time to talk the matter over a little more. I've got to go now to attend to some things outside."

Thereupon Mrs. People betook herself to the kitchen, and Mr. Bullripple went to see Dennis Roon, with whom he had an earnest talk.

"Now, look here, sir," said Mr. Roon, after listening attentively to some remarks from the old man, "that sort of thing moight do very well wid Missis Follory, wid most of her lungs gone, but it's altogither another piece of business wid a sthout young mon like Misther People. I can stand on me own legs as well as the nixt mon, but I'm the feyther uv a fam'ly, and I don't want me head cracked, even if I am the top mon in the ind."

"Don't you trouble yourself about that," said Mr. Bullripple. "When my nephew comes back he'll find himself better off than he ever was before in his life, and instead of fighting anybody, he'll want to shake hands all round and stand treat."

"It moight be for his good," said Dennis, "to take a thrip loike that, and git acquainted wid the chape cabbage and pittaty men."

"It'll be for his good in a lot of ways," said Enoch. "You don't suppose his mother and me would be wantin' to send him away if it wasn't for his good.

Now, if you'll attend to this business for me, we'll just give you the thanks of the whole family, and I'll throw in five dollars besides. And, if you have to spend anything, I'll pay it back to you."

"All roight, sir! all roight!" exclaimed Dennis, vigorously changing the positions of a dozen large apples which stood in a row. "I'm not the mon to back down from sarvin' a whole fam'ly in disthress. You sind him to me, sir, and I'll fix it all sthraight. I don't ask fur me foive dollars nather, but I won't be mane enough to run agin the intherests of me own children, and the clothes they could buy for the money."

When Enoch Bullripple got back to Vatoldi's he found his nephew John in a very bad humor. A produce dealer who had long served him with vegetables had been influenced by the boycotters to decline to furnish Vatoldi's with any further supplies in his line until the demands of the waiters had been complied with. This action on the part of the dealer, to whom Vatoldi's had been a most excellent customer, so enraged John that he vowed that under no circumstances would he ever again buy anything from that man. It was, therefore, with a wrathful independence of spirit that he listened to his uncle's statement that the man who kept the apple-stand two blocks below would be glad to make him acquainted with the steward of the steamer which was to sail that afternoon, who would, no doubt, make a contract with him to bring him from the South all the vegetables he wanted, and a great deal better ones, and cheaper than he could get them here.

When Mr. Bullripple had said this, he said no more, but went about his duties, and John went about his own. But at noon John put on his hat, and leaving the establishment, at which few luncheon-desiring customers had yet arrived, to the care of his uncle, he went out to see the apple-man.

Dennis Roon was very eloquent in regard to the subject of obtaining early vegetables direct from the South. John listened attentively, but did not say much in reply. He was not as angry as he had been, but he was still determined to free himself from the power of the dealers in vegetables. If one could be influenced by the boycotters, so might the others.

"I'll tell ye, Misther People," said Dennis Roon, "what I'll do fur ye. I'll go down to that stamer wid ye, and inthroduce ye to the steward. He's a foine eye for bananas, and all he knows about thim he knows about termatties and swate pittaties. If he can't fetch ye thim things himself, he'll make a conthract for ye with thim as can sind 'em. Now, whin can ye go down to the pier wid me?"

John replied that he could go between three and four o'clock that afternoon, that being the time when he had most leisure. Having made these arrangements, he went back to Vatoldi's, perceiving as he neared the door that the sidewalks had been freshly sprinkled with the boycotters' circulars, which many passers-by were picking up and reading.

When John went to the bank that afternoon, his report to Mr. Stull, combined with that gentleman's own observations during the day, might have been expected to produce a depressing effect upon the

mind of the proprietor of Vatoldi's. But the mind of Mr. Stull was not to be thus depressed. As a thoroughly equipped restaurant-keeper, engaged in combat with a host of recusant employees, his abilities shone at their brightest. The business at Vatoldi's was demoralized in every branch; many of the regular customers kept away, not only on account of the present inferior service, but for fear of disturbance; and, although the tables at some hours were moderately well filled, it was by people who were brought there by curiosity, or by a desire to assist the oppressed. These were not the patrons Mr. Stull wanted, for he knew that Vatoldi's could only be supported by customers who came there for their own good. Most of the new waiters were unpracticed and inefficient, and, worse than that, several had left the night before, being frightened by the boycotters, and there was danger that the whole force might decamp at any moment. But the soul of Mr. Stull rose grandly above this storm. He assured John that he would never give in to the demands of the rascals, and that no coat-tail should ever profane his establishment.

"If I could come forward in my own proper person," he said, raising his tall and large-boned figure to its greatest height, "which, as you well know, my present social and business position forbids, I would show those waiters that they were running against a wall of rock when they ran against me. But as I cannot do this, I expect you to stand up in my place."

Thereupon Mr. Stull loaded his manager with injunctions and directions. He instructed him in the

methods by which Mr. Bullripple and Mrs. People could be made even more useful than they now were. He approved of efforts to obtain direct supplies of Southern products. And he poured into John's mind more points of restaurant management, joined with defense against boycotters, than that receptacle could well contain.

As John went away to keep his appointment with the apple-man, he took off his hat and walked with it in his hand; his head required cooling. Dennis was ready for him, and the two took a street-car for the pier. John noticed that his companion carried in his hand a cheap but new valise, well filled; but, not being in the habit of asking questions about the business of other people, he did not allude to it.

On reaching the steamer they found it a scene of great activity; and when they went on board, Dennis left his companion and hurried forward. In a few moments he returned, and said to John: "By Jarge, sir, they're jist a-goin' to sthart! But the steward he tills me that if we'd loike to take a little thrip doon the bay, and coom back with the poilot, he'll have toime to talk wid ye about the vigitables, which he says he can git ye by the cart-load three times a week, and as chape as the dirt they grow in."

"But won't we be charged for such a trip?" asked John.

"And do ye s'pose ye'd be expected to pay for a small sail like that whin ye'r just takin' it to make a conthract wid one of the ship's officers? Bedad, sir, there'll be none of that!"

In the present condition of his brow and his body,

John was very willing to refresh himself with a trip down the bay; and, although he did not think he could very well spare the time, his inclinations, combined with what he believed to be a duty, induced him to agree to the apple-man's proposal.

There were very few passengers going South at that time of year, and John had the after-deck all to himself. When the steamer started, Mr. Roon's expressions of delight at the pleasures of the excursion were vehement and frequent.

"Even if ye niver buy so much as a pittaty skin, this thrip will be worth the little throuble ye took to git it by manes of its fillin' yer lungs wid say-air, and settin' you up sthrong agin for your work."

Every ten or fifteen minutes this worthy Irishman went forward to see if the time had come for John's business to be attended to, but always returned saying that the steward was very busy, but that he would see Mr. People in plenty of time.

"How far do they go out before the pilot leaves them?" asked John, who knew very little of marine affairs.

"Oh, a long ways," answered Dennis, "for they've got to git clane clare of all the sand-bars afore they let go uv him. And ye needn't be afraid that me, the feyther of a fam'ly that's expectin' me to coom home to supper, and thin be off to the stand to let Pat coom and git his, is goin' to be lift. I've tried this thing afore, Misther People, and I'm not the mon to git lift by the poilot."

The water was beginning to be pretty rough, and the sea-breeze very fresh, when Dennis came to John

and informed him that the steward was ready now to see him, and would he come down-stairs?

John had so much enjoyed the unaccustomed pleasure of this water excursion that he had almost forgotten that there were such things as cabbages and potatoes; and when he followed Dennis below he did not notice that the engine had stopped, and that the speed of the steamer was slacking.

"Jist set down there," said Dennis, "and I'll fetch him in a minute."

And then the apple-man hurried on deck, descended into the pilot-boat, and returned to New York.

The report of Mr. Roon was eagerly listened to by Enoch Bullripple. "And you gave my letter, with the ticket in it, to somebody to hand to him, and you put his valise in the room that I engaged for him?"

"Yis," said Dennis, "I did all of thim things, and I put two apples on his bid to remoind him of home. He'll be a happy mon, Misther Bullripple, to-morrow and the nixt day, a-v'yagin' over the paceful say; and coom back sthrong and hearty, and ready to let you and his lady mither go back to yer home in the rural disthricts. And I give the poilot a dollar, and me car-fare was tin cints."

## CHAPTER VIII

HE Saturday and Sunday on which Mr. Crisman chose to join a yachting excursion, instead of making the visit to Cherry Bridge which had been expected of him, were two of the most charming days of June; and, although Mrs. Justin remarked several times that it was a great pity Mr. Crisman could not be with them in this lovely weather, she was obliged to admit that such weather must also be very delightful on the water. Miss Gay made no remarks concerning Mr. Crisman's absence, but she seemed to be doing a great deal of thinking, either on this subject or some other. As for Mr. Stratford, it could not have made much difference to him whether or not Mr. Crisman was there on the Saturday, for he spent the greater part of that day in writing letters.

Shortly after breakfast Miss Gay went into the parlor with some books, and after remaining there for a quarter of an hour or more she went out on the piazza, where she ensconced herself comfortably in a large arm-chair to read. She did not stay there very long, however, but returned to the parlor, which, after all, was perhaps a more secluded place at this hour, and better adapted to purposes of study. The house-

hold affairs to which Mrs. Justin attended, and the long conversation she afterwards had with her farmer, could have been attended to and carried on as well upon a rainy day as during this beautiful morning: and it may therefore be said that Mr. Thorne was the only one of the little party who thoroughly enjoyed the atmosphere of sunshine, tempered by the morning breezes, which threw its yellow light into the dark-green tones of the dew-besprinkled grass, and upon the fresh new foliage of the trees, and who breathed with full appreciation the blossom-scented air.

He breathed this air on the lawn, where the dewy grass dampened his boots; and then he breathed it on the piazza, where for twenty minutes or more he walked steadily up and down. Then he looked into the library, where Stratford was writing, and after that he went into the parlor, and seeing Miss Gay there, he said that he hoped he was not interrupting her studies. Miss Gay laid the book in her lap and said she was not studying, but reading. Mr. Thorne took up one of Miss Gay's books which lay on the table and asked if its subject was a new study, or whether she had been engaged upon it while in college. The answer to this question led to a number of inquiries from Mr. Thorne in regard to the young lady's past studies and future intentions in that line. This was a subject in which he took a deep and intelligent interest, and it was impossible that Gay should not also take an interest in the conversation which followed; but, although she talked with willingness, and even with some earnestness, her mind frequently

wandered from the subject in hand. She felt that this was what might be considered a temporary conversation, carried on while expecting something else. But she listened and talked as well and as pleasantly as she could until Mrs. Justin came into the room, when indeed a faint shadow of disappointment passed over her face as she looked up and saw that it was Mrs. Justin.

The rector of the parish, with Miss Patty, his seventeen-year-old daughter, came to dinner. But shortly after that meal he drove away to make another parochial visit, leaving Miss Patty, at Mrs. Justin's solicitation, to be picked up on his return. A four-handed game of croquet was now possible, notwithstanding Mr. Stratford had driven over to the Bullripple farm. As Miss Patty was a mere beginner at the game, which had scarcely been played at all during her school-days, it was necessary that Mrs. Justin, being the best player of the party, should take her as a partner.

Miss Armatt had no reason whatever to object to Mr. Thorne as a partner, but she did not seem to care very much for croquet that afternoon. Mr. Thorne assisted her in every possible legitimate way, but he did not direct her course and manage her play as Mr. Stratford had done. Gay, indeed, did not appear to desire this, and developed a certain degree of independence which had not been at all observable when she played before. She went through her wickets as rapidly as possible, and ended in becoming a rover before her partner had reached the turning-stake. This was a very different style of play from that upon

which Mr. Stratford had so pleasantly and wisely insisted, and the result was that Mrs. Justin and Patty, by keeping their balls together, won the game, although their progress to victory, owing to the uncertain play of the younger lady, was very slow and dubious.

Mr. Thorne accompanied the ladies to church the next morning; and in the afternoon the four friends set out for a long stroll over the fields and hills. With the natural bias of the younger man towards the younger lady of a party, Arthur Thorne walked with Miss Gay, following the other couple quite closely, however, as Mrs. Justin seemed desirous of a general chat as they strolled along. Gay was not in very animated spirits, and, in fact, seemed a little bored by the walk; and this, being soon noticed by Mrs. Justin, was not altogether displeasing to that lady. She had not forgiven Mr. Crisman for preferring a yachting expedition to the society of his lady-love, but she believed it due to propriety that, in some degree, Gay should feel his absence.

When they began the ascent of a long grass-covered hill, which in some parts of our country would be termed a little mountain, the party scattered somewhat, and Gay, who was very light of foot, soon found herself in the lead. Stratford, however, who was also a good uphill walker, overtook her before very long, and the two continued their way together. About this time, probably owing to the altitude of the hill and the slightly increased rarefaction of the air, Gay's spirits began to rise, and she talked in quite an animated way about the distant scenery

which now showed itself. She still pressed vigorously onward and upward, Stratford keeping pace with her; and the two, without knowing that they were leaving their companions out of sight, passed over the brow of the hill and down a slight declivity on the other side, towards an extensive grove of sugar-maples, which was one of the objects of their walk. They reached the grove and passed some distance into its shade, and then they rested and waited for their companions. These not making their appearance, Stratford and Miss Gay walked slowly along one of the winding wood-roads which led them through the grove, and out upon an eminence, surmounted by a rail fence which formed part of the boundary between Mrs. Justin's estate and that of her neighbor.

This eminence, Stratford assured his companion, was one of the best spots in that part of the country from which to view the approaching sunset, and here he proposed they should wait for Mrs. Justin and Mr. Thorne. One of the top rails of the fence was very broad and firm, and as Gay was rather tired from her climb and walk, Stratford assisted her to take a seat upon it; and the rail being strong enough to support them both, he sat upon it also.

The sun, with its accustomed regularity of movement, slowly went down, but Mrs. Justin and Thorne did not come up. Gay wondered at their delay, but she soon forgot them in gazing upon the glories of yellow, red, and gold which began to spread over the western sky reaching upward from the tender green which lay along the horizon to the pink flush which,

half way towards the zenith, met the deep overhanging blue.

No such scene as this was ever visible from the lower country by Cherry Bridge, and Gay sat and looked upon it as if it had been a revelation. Beautiful cloud-forms glowed in this rich color and in that, and faded away, through lilac and pink, to rose-tinted gray, and out of the vast ether came other outlines of clouds, to be delicately tinted and to fade away.

The evening star began to twinkle through the dull golden mists, when Stratford stepped down from the fence, and, saying that he did not believe that the others were coming at all, proposed to Miss Gay that they should return to the house.

With one lingering look above and around her, Gay gave her hand to her companion and sprang from the fence. They walked rapidly down towards the maple grove, and when they reached it they found that although the sky was still glowing with light, the shades of the grove were shades indeed. It was so dark that Gay was very much surprised, and she declared that if she had been alone it would have been utterly impossible for her to find her way along that indistinguishable wood-road. But she was not alone, and Mr. Stratford knew the road well, having walked it by day and by night. It was necessary that she should take his arm to avoid tripping over unseen obstacles, and they walked slowly. Gay was not the least afraid, and her eyes becoming accustomed to the gloom of the grove, she was almost as much entranced by its weird and somber beauties as she had been by the glories of the sunset.

Even when they came out of the woods and walked under the open sky, they could not hasten, for the shades of night were now upon them, and a misstep on the hill-side might prove unpleasant. Slowly they strolled homeward under the points of starlight that began to twinkle above them, and Stratford for the most part talked, and Gay for the most part listened; and whatever feelings of impatience, or disappointment, or boredom she may have had during that day, or the one preceding, now disappeared altogether.

It was quite dark when they walked over the lawn towards the house, but Gay felt no compunctions of conscience at having staid out so late. She had been with Mr. Stratford, and that fact, to her mind, gave to the proceeding all the sanction that it needed.

Mrs. Justin and Arthur Thorne had taken a path through the maple grove which led them to a point from which the rail fence where Stratford and Miss Gay had seated themselves was not visible. Seeing nothing of their companions, they had returned the way they came, and reached the house about the time that the sunset began to fade.

When Miss Gay and Stratford arrived, Mrs. Justin made no remarks concerning the lateness of the hour, for she did not consider that she had a right to scold grown-up people, one of whom was engaged to be married. But she remembered that when Mr. Crisman and Gay had walked together, they had not kept supper waiting.

The next day Mr. Thorne returned to the city, and exchanged the hues of forest and field for the lugubrious colors of his apartments. But into the midst of

those dull greens and yellows, those clay-reds and weak blues, he brought the delicate flush on a young girl's cheek, the deep blue of her large eyes, the pink of her lips, and the sunny brownness of her hair. As he meditatively leaned back against the long thin rods which formed the back of his antique chair, these colors were very forcibly brought out by the somber propriety of his surroundings.

After breakfast on that morning Miss Gay did not wander from parlor to piazza to find a suitable place in which to pursue her studies. She carried the ancient atlas and the books directly to the place where she had last looked over them with Mr. Stratford, and in ten minutes he came there and joined her. The atlas and the books were opened, and again they followed the meandering streams of the springs of literature. It was not very long before Mrs. Justin made one of the party, and she interested herself to a considerable degree in their investigations; but household affairs interfered with the permanence of her stay, and Gay was able to appreciate the immense advantages of study and companionship with a kindly sympathetic though dominant mind over the lonely journeys which she had often made into the region of intellectual investigation.

During the next five days, Mrs. People was still absent from the Bullripple farm, and Mr. Stratford remained at the mansion of Mrs. Justin. On any of these days, when Mrs. Justin had the company of either Stratford or Gay, she generally had that of both of them. Sometimes she did not find them at all, for they seemed to be subject to sudden determi-

nations to row or stroll. They did not treat her discourteously on these occasions, for they invariably asked her to accompany them if she were anywhere about; but it was astonishing to herself how seldom she happened to be about at the right moment for an invitation.

At last Mrs. Justin could endure this state of things no longer, and determined to speak. It was not necessary to ask anything of Gay, for the estimation in which that young lady held Mr. Stratford not only grew and brightened, as the day grows and brightens after the rising of the sun, but was quite as clear and apparent to Mrs. Justin as any light of day could be. Against the brightness of this esteem there never rose a cloud of obscuring vapor from the Crismanic fires which Mrs. Justin firmly believed still glowed deep down in the soul of Gay Armatt. This absence of even transient obscuration troubled much the mind of Mrs. Justin, for even the fires of the strongest volcano must go out if the vents are permanently stopped.

As it was not needed to question Gay, who spoke so often and so freely of Mr. Stratford, it would be also a very delicate and difficult matter to advise her; and it was for these reasons that Mrs. Justin decided to speak to Stratford. She would have a plain talk with him, and tell him all her mind. With this object she invited him to drive her to the village in his buggy. For an earnest tête-à-tête there are few places better than a buggy. Interruption is scarcely probable unless a wheel comes off.

When they were well on the road, Mrs. Justin plunged into the subject. "Do you appreciate," she said, "the influence which your constant companionship is having upon Gay Armatt?"

"What is the influence?" asked Stratford.

"It is the influence of a man who completely absorbs the attention and interest of a young woman. I believe that when Gay is not reading, or walking, or talking with you, she mentally places you before her so that she can follow you in her thoughts. I know that she does that when she is with me, for she is satisfied to talk of nothing but you. I believe at this moment she thinks more of you, and better of you, than of any man in the world."

"And of this you do not approve," he said, "there being no just foundation for such an opinion?"

"On the contrary," said Mrs. Justin vehemently, "there is so much foundation that I have sometimes almost wished that you could be suddenly turned into the most ordinary of men. It is the fact that you do possess those qualities which must attract the admiration and regard of a girl like Gay that gives you your influence over her."

"And why should not that influence be exerted?" asked Stratford.

"You know very well," was the quick answer. "If this influence does not cease, it will end in the complete alienation of Mr. Crisman and Gay Armatt."

"And that," said Stratford, "is exactly what I want to bring about."

Mrs. Justin started, and turning suddenly towards her companion, she looked at him with wide-open eyes, but said not a word.

"You have spoken plainly to me, Mrs. Justin," continued Stratford, "and I am going to speak quite as plainly to you. I consider Gay Armatt a phenomenally fine girl. From what you had told me, I expected to find her a most interesting student, but I did not expect to find her an independent thinker, with a sensitive susceptibility to inspirations such as I have not known before, and a mind as fine and noble as the objects it fixes itself upon. I had scarcely known this girl before I found out that she was engaged to be married to a man who was utterly unworthy of her and unfit for her, and whose union with her would put an end to all her purposes and aspirations, and finish by degrading her, as nearly as such a thing is possible, to his level."

"I do not believe it!" exclaimed Mrs. Justin. "She would elevate him."

"Excuse me," said Stratford, "but you are entirely wrong. He is not capable of being elevated; and if he were, he has no desire to be elevated. His marriage with Gay Armatt would put an absolute end to what we now look upon as her career. I know this, and I do not see how you can help knowing it."

"I must admit," said Mrs. Justin, "that I have feared this, and that I have spent hours in thinking about it. But I have a better opinion of Mr. Crisman than you have; I have more faith in Gay than you have; and I trust to her power over him. But this should not be the question. Gay has promised

Mr. Crisman to marry him, and, to my mind, this is just the same as if these two persons were already married. To do anything which would induce her to break this engagement is positively and absolutely wicked."

"I cannot agree with you," said Stratford. "An engagement is not the same as a marriage."

"Mr. Stratford," said Mrs. Justin, "it is of no use for us to argue this question. All that we should consider is that these two young people love each other and desire to be man and wife; and you have no right to come between them."

"How did Miss Armatt happen to be engaged to Crisman?" asked Stratford. "Was he not her first lover?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Justin; "the first and only one."

"I thought so," he said, "and that explains the situation exactly. As I said before, she is a girl of sensitive susceptibility; he is the first handsome young fellow who made love to her, and she accepted him. In some respects her character is unformed, but she ought not to be made to suffer on that account."

"Your kindly disposition is as phenomenal as Gay's mind," said Mrs. Justin.

Stratford made no answer to this, nor did he smile.

"Mrs. Justin," he said, "you have helped this young girl to become what she is, and have put her in a position from which she can go on, and take her place among the eminent men and women of her day. Now, I intend to save her from losing all you gave her. You expect her to become one of the brightest

jewels in your crown. I intend to prevent her from dropping from that crown and being trampled in the mud."

"Do you mean to say," said Mrs. Justin, "that you deliberately propose to break off this engagement?"

"If it shall be possible," said Stratford, "I intend to alienate Miss Armatt's affections from Crisman by making her understand the value of the companionship of better men than he is. I do not hesitate to say that I consider myself a much better man than he is."

"A noble undertaking!" exclaimed Mrs. Justin. "And when you have made her cast him off, you will kindly marry her yourself!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Stratford. "I knew you would think that, and perhaps say it, but you are mistaken. Positively, I shall not marry her."

"And what will you do with her," asked Mrs. Justin, "when you have torn her affections from her lover, and fixed them on yourself? Will you cast her, heart-broken, out upon the world?"

"Your language is very strong, Mrs. Justin, and you do injustice to my motives. Miss Armatt is not one to be thrown out on the world, as you put it. She is a young woman whom to win would be an ambition worthy the best man of our day. Once freed from this absolutely unsuitable engagement, into which she entered because her young soul knew so little about men, she will be free to marry a man who is worthy of her, and there is no danger but that man will appear."

"But," said Mrs. Justin, "it is not to be supposed that he will appear instantly. It may be a year or two before she meets the man you think she ought to marry. Is she to be left unprotected from other Crismans all this time? Or do you intend to carry her over the gap?"

"I shall carry her over the gap," said Stratford.

Mrs. Justin laughed outright, but not in merriment. "What an utter piece of absurdity!" she exclaimed. "Why, Mr. Stratford," she added with much earnestness, "don't you know enough of men's hearts and women's hearts to understand that if you should win Gay from Crisman, and then desire to give her up to another man, which I do not in the least believe you would desire, that you could not do it? Cannot you see, as plainly as you see the road before you, that Gay's affections would by that time be so firmly fixed upon you that she would not be given up? Giving up would be impossible for either of you. Now, don't you think you will be much more true to yourself, should you determine to persevere in carrying out this plan, which I call an iniquitous one, frankly to admit that if you get Gay Armatt away from Mr. Crisman, you will marry her yourself?"

"I intend to carry out my plan," said Stratford, "and I shall not marry Miss Armatt."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Justin; and as they were now entering the village, the conversation ceased.

As they were driving homeward, Stratford said: "You know very well, Mrs. Justin, that I have the highest possible regard for what you think and say;

but, in this case, even your opinion cannot turn me from my determination to save this young girl, if I can, and give her a chance to make her life what it ought to be. But, now that I know that you disapprove of what I am doing, I do not think it is right that I should remain at your house. But you must not suppose that I am going away with any feeling of resentment. I know you so well that nothing you have said surprises me; and, indeed, looking upon you as yourself, I am not sure that I should be satisfied should you entertain any opinions on this matter other than those you have expressed to me."

"I might have expressed them more gently," said she; "but, indeed, Mr. Stratford, this is a matter which I feel very deeply. I suppose, of course, that, remembering what you have said, I ought not to wish you to stay with us while Gay is here, but it is to me one of the saddest features of the whole affair that there should be any objection to your staying in my house."

"I thank you most kindly for that," said Stratford.

"But you can't go to the farm-house," she said. "Mrs. People has not returned, and there is no one to take care of you."

"Oh, I shall do very well," said he. "Now that Thorne has gone, I shall not mind being there without Mrs. People. But I suppose she will return in a few days; and, in any case, I shall make a visit to the city next week."

Nothing was said for some minutes, and then Mrs. Justin exclaimed: "I do wish, Mr. Stratford, that you could see this affair as I see it! If you could, I am sure you would instantly abandon your purpose."

"How different we are," said Stratford. "I hope, and what is more, I expect, that the day will come when you will say, although you may not even then believe, that my methods were proper, that their result has been most happy."

"You may think," said Mrs. Justin, "and you have reason for it, that you are a man who is never turned from his purpose. You may be very steadfast in your present purpose of merely carrying Gay over that gap, but you will be turned from it."

"By whom?" asked Stratford.

"By Gay. You will marry her."

When Mr. Stratford took leave of the ladies that afternoon, Gay Armatt did not feel so sorry as she would have felt if she had not known that Mr. Crisman was coming in the evening train. She was a woman now, and all sorts of young and half-fledged sentiments were fluttering into her soul, some flying restlessly about and then out again, and some settling first here and then there, as if very uncertain whether they ought to stay or not. But one little sentiment nestled down as if it felt itself at home, and it made Gay feel that while Mr. Crisman was with her it was just as well that Mr. Stratford should be away. There was no reason connected with this sentiment. It was nothing but a little partly feathered thing that did not know itself where it had come from. It found Gay's soul a very quiet and pleasant place in which to nestle, for the young lady did not know that Mr. Stratford was not coming to the house again while she was there.

## CHAPTER IX

HEN Mr. Enoch Bullripple found himself with the Vatoldi establishment upon his hands; with John People steaming southward down the coast; and an unknown proprietor far away in some hazy distance, he rubbed those horny hands with much satisfaction. He had never managed a restaurant, and under ordinary circumstances he would not have considered himself competent to undertake such responsibility; but this was a peculiar case, and Enoch believed himself fully able to treat it in the peculiar fashion which he had in view. He was a shrewd, quick-witted man, and in the course of his varied life had adapted himself to a great many out-of-the-way circumstances.

He had but a single object in this scheme of getting control of Vatoldi's, and that was to discover the owner, the man behind the scenes. That this owner was determined not to come forward into public view was plain enough, for if anything would have brought him forward, it would have been the recent disturbance of his business. That for some reason John was determined not to reveal the identity of this person was equally plain.

That John himself was at the head of affairs was a supposition well enough suited to the public mind, but Mr. Bullripple's mind would not entertain it for a moment. In the first place, he knew that his nephew had not the capital nor the interest to control such a business, and that he did not enjoy the income nor the independence which it would have given him; and, more than this, he did not believe that John had the ability to plan and carry on the admirable organization which had given Vatoldi's its reputation and its success. That John had abilities of a high order, his uncle did not doubt, but these, in Enoch's belief, were the abilities to do well what he was told to do. If he could find out the man who told his nephew what he was to do, and who rewarded him so indifferently for doing it, he did not doubt but he could make a very considerable revolution in the state of affairs, and one which would result to John's advantage. He had his nephew's welfare very much at heart, and he did not share his sister's opinion that the young man should return to them and become a farmer. From his own experience and observation he believed that there was more money in restaurant-keeping than in farming.

When Mrs. People heard that her son had gone off on a sea trip, she was glad of it, of course, because she believed he needed such a trip, but she was very much disturbed that he had not taken leave of her. Of the means employed to send John away Enoch told her nothing. She was not a person who could prevent the outside world from sharing in any information which she possessed, and besides, she would have been very much troubled, and, therefore, might

have very much interfered with her brother's plans had she known that John had gone off against his will.

"You see, Hannah," said Mr. Bullripple, when he communicated the fact of John's departure, "there wasn't no time for good-byes. The steamer started off sooner than he expected, and it was lucky I had packed his valise for him and sent it down. But now he's off all right, with the best kind of weather, and he'll be back in about a week, well set up with good sea air. And what's more, if he's got his wits about him, he ought to do a little profitable tradin' down there, if it's nothin' but early peaches."

"Does Mr. Vatoldi know he has gone?" asked Mrs. People.

"No, he don't," said Enoch. "And if he wants to know anythin' about it, let him come and ask me; that's all he's got to do. And now, Hannah," continued Mr. Bullripple, "as long as you and me has got charge here, there's goin' to be a change in this restaurant. Things is goin' to be twisted around, and made very different from what they was before."

"What's the good of twistin' 'em?" asked Mrs. People. "I'm sure John's ways was all very good ways."

"That was all jus' so," replied her brother, "when the business was on its legs. But now that it's flat on its back we've got to put a pillow under its head, and do a lot of things to make it comfortable. I don't suppose there'll be more customers than you and me can manage to do for, and if we jus' keep ourselves bold and chipper, and let people see that we're afraid of no-

body, and that we're goin' to do what we please without carin' what anybody thinks about it, it won't be long before them old waiters will git tired howlin' for their coat-tails, and they'll all be beggin' to be took back. And when John comes home we can jus' hand over the place to him, and let him run it along as he used to."

"But I should think Mr. Vatoldi would have somethin' to say to all this," said Mrs. People.

"Very good," replied her brother; "and all he's got to do is to come and say it."

Vatoldi's was closed early that evening, and Mr. Bullripple went to work to inaugurate the new system by which the establishment was to be conducted. By the end of the following day the place was in pretty good running order. All the recently engaged waiters, many of whom showed signs of faint-heartedness and might be at any time frightened away by the boycotters, were discharged, and their places were supplied by a body of men whose training had been received at what is known as the cheap American restaurant.

If there remained extant anything of the spirit which used to animate the volunteer firemen of our city, the "Jakeys" and the "Sykeses" who "ran with the machine," and considered that banging each other over the head with their brass horns was one of the necessary accompaniments of a conflagration, it remained in these men. With a bold, undaunted air they strolled up and down the rows of tables with the peculiar intrepidity of shuffle known only to waiters of this class. In strong, untrammeled tones

they rang out the orders of the customers, sounding startling changes, brought about by continued repetition, upon the names of standard dishes and viands, and tossing to each diner his pasteboard check with an accuracy of aim which was sure to deposit it upon some retentive article of food.

These men had never worn dress-coats, and the army and navy would have to march over their dead bodies before they could be made to wear them. If a strike were on foot in which they sympathized, not a fallen spoon would they pick up from the floor until the matter in dispute had been settled; but in a strike like this at Vatoldi's they could see no sense, and if a boycotter had attempted to tamper with one of them, he might have imagined that the volunteer fire department had been revived, and that he and the waiter ran with rival companies.

The class of restaurant to which these men belonged was a very familiar one to Mr. Bullripple. When he was in business in the city he took his meals in such places, and many of their prominent features were fixed in his memory. In its palmy days, when everything was flowing smoothly at Vatoldi's, Enoch would never have advised his nephew to adopt any of these familiar features; but now there had been a great change in the conditions of the place, and the old man seemed to think it necessary to act in harmony with this fact; and he therefore set about making everything as different as possible from what it used to be. Placards were hung on the walls on which prominent articles of the ordinary bill of fare were inscribed in large letters of black and red.

Mrs. People was very proud of her ability in the manufacture of various kinds of pie, and as soon as she found she could do what she pleased in the kitchen, she went to work with radiant delight to make and bake pies. Many of the largest placards were emblazoned with the legend, "Home-made pies," followed by an enumeration of varieties, and the price per slice. A table near the door was covered with cans, jars, and bottles, selected from the storeroom on account of the brightness of their labels; and on an adjoining table — there were plenty of them to spare just now — were specimens of cheese, pastry, fruit cakes, etc., all covered with gauze netting to keep off the flies. In the two large show windows, which had never before contained anything but some luxuriant and handsome specimens of tropical plants in æsthetically decorated jars, now appeared some of the aforementioned placards, together with plates of uncooked chops or steaks, a box of live crabs packed in seaweed, a few particularly resplendent tin cans, with other objects of the sort adapted to catch the eye of the passer-by.

When the boycotters discovered John's absence, and noticed the great alteration in the aspect of Vatoldi's, they naturally supposed that the place had changed hands, and that in this way their oppressors had eluded the punishment which was being dealt out to them. But a few inquiries made to Mr. Bullripple by an emissary soon dispelled this notion, and they found that Mr. People was only temporarily absent, and that the establishment had not been sold, and that they could expect no favors from the parties in

charge. They therefore continued their annoyances, and endeavored, by every method with which they did not expect police interference, to create a public feeling in favor of themselves, and against the heel-grinding practiced in the den called Vatoldi's.

When Mr. Bullripple and Mrs. People first appeared at Vatoldi's, that constant customer, J. Weatherby Stull, met them as he would have met any man or woman whom, years ago, he had been in the habit of occasionally seeing in the neighborhood of Cherry Bridge, where he then lived. He spoke to them with a good-natured condescension, into which he infused enough cold dignity to show them the immense distance between their station and his own. He asked a few questions in regard to crops, etc., and then ordered his meal, and took out his newspaper. When he first discovered John's absence from his accustomed post, he was surprised and uneasy; and although he was careful not to show any interest in the matter, he could not avoid asking Mr. Bullripple what had become of his nephew, adding that he was so accustomed to seeing him there that the place appeared odd without him.

Enoch replied that John had gone away to make arrangements for regular supplies from the South, and that he would not be back for several days, perhaps a week.

"But that won't hender this place from goin' all right," added Mr. Bullripple. "John's mother and me will run the place, and you can always git your breakfast, dinner, and supper here, Mr. Stull, with somethin' to eat between meals, if you want it."

There was not a more astounded person in the city of New York than the proprietor of Vatoldi's when he received this information. A hundred questions rushed towards his tongue, but he could ask none of them. His long-continued habit of guarded non-interest when performing his part of a regular patron of the establishment had made him very prudent, and he could not help feeling that more than ordinary caution would be required in dealing with a sharp-witted old man like Enoch Bullripple. So he contented himself with some simple remark, paid his bill, and went away.

But his way was not a quiet one. His mind was troubled and tossed by conjectures regarding John's amazing stupidity at leaving his post, and, without consultation with himself, putting Vatoldi's in charge of those two country clodhoppers. To be sure, John had spoken to him about supplies from the South, but nothing had been said which could possibly lead him to suppose that that young man would actually leave the city for several days, or perhaps a week. Such idiocy, such criminal insubordination, he had never heard of! He could not understand it, and no supposition in regard to the matter which he brought before his reasoning powers was able to satisfy them.

But this state of mind was oil-smoothed tranquillity compared to the typhoon of emotions which swept through him when he perceived the changes which Mr. Bullripple had wrought in Vatoldi's — that ideal restaurant, which was at once his pride, his profit, and his closet skeleton. When he saw the firemen-like waiters striding up and down among his tables;

when he saw the black-and-red-lettered placards, bearing the words, "Clam Chowder," "Golden Buck," "A Fry in a Box," "A Stew in a Pail"; but particularly when he saw the sign, "Home-made Pies, Five Cents a Slice," did the blood of Mr. Stull run in his veins like trickling streams from a glacier. He was so much astonished by the aspect of the place that he forgot to sit down, and stood almost motionless at the end of a table, until one of the new waiters strode up to him, and in a correspondingly strident voice inquired, "Have ye give yer order?"

For a few minutes Mr. Stull felt as if his whole nature demanded that he should rise up and assert himself; that then and there he should announce that he, J. Weatherby Stull, was lord and king of this establishment, and thereupon drive out the rowdy waiters, pack off to their homes the execrable Bullripple and his sister, tear down those vile placards, and, if necessary, shut up the place until the time should come when it could be restored to its former high position.

But he did not rise and speak. Even this soul-harrowing desecration could not give enough courage to this bank president, to this owner of the highest-priced pew, to this dignified condescender in society to avow to the world that, besides all this, he was a restaurant-keeper, and that it was the income from the sale of beefsteaks and mutton chops, tea, coffee, and ice-cream that had enabled him to establish the bank, to hire the pew, and to reach that high position in society from which he was accustomed to condescend. No, he could not do it. For too many years

had he kept this vulgar source of wealth concealed from the public eye to allow it now to appear and stain with its gravies and its soups that unblemished eminence on which he believed himself to stand.

There was nothing for him to do but to sit dumb and see all this ruinous profanation of Vatoldi's without lifting a finger to prevent it. But if ever the time came when he could grind into dust the heart and fortunes of that rascally old farmer and his nephew, to whose treachery the present state of affairs was due, Stull swore to himself that with a firm and rapid hand he would grind.

He could not eat the meal he had ordered, and when he had sat over it long enough, he went up to the desk behind which Mr. Bullripple stood. As a well-known and regular customer, Mr. Stull thought he might speak without exciting suspicion.

"You have made great changes here, Mr. Bullripple," he said. "I have been a patron of this establishment for some years, and I have never seen anything like this before. I am not accustomed to being waited upon by men of this class, and I do not like to sit in a room surrounded by such placards as I see upon these walls. The place has fallen very much from its former condition, which was highly creditable to its managers and its proprietors. Was it your nephew who decided to make these changes?"

"Now, look here, Mr. Stull," said Enoch, leaning forward on the desk, and speaking in a conciliatory tone of voice, "John hasn't got nothin' to do with all this. John's away on business, and till he comes back, I'll have to run the consarn. I've got head

enough on my shoulders, Mr. Stull, to know that a place that's bein' boycotted can't be run like a place that everybody's got good words and good money for. Now, till John gits home I'm goin' to let them strikin' waiters see that neither them nor their coat-tails is needed here. And let me give you a piece of advice, Mr. Stull. It's easy enough to see that the kind of restaurant I'm goin' to run isn't suited to you and your likin's, and, if I was you, I'd keep away for a time. There's other restaurants that would suit you better, and if things ever gits round to the way they used to be, you might come back ag'in."

It was difficult for Mr. Stull to control his voice and his manner, but he did it. "I am not accustomed," he said in a tone as cold and disinterested as he could command, "to change the place where I take my meals. I have been coming here for a long time, and I shall continue to do so. By the way,"— and here Mr. Stull determined to make a somewhat hazardous stroke,—"do the proprietors of this establishment approve of these changes?"

Mr. Bullripple leaned farther over the desk, and his tone became very confidential. "John never told me what sort of man Vatoldi is, and I've never asked him anythin' about him. But it's my opinion, Mr. Stull, that he is a mean, sneakin' hound who gits as much as he can out of other people, and gives 'em jus' as little as he can make 'em take, and when any trouble comes up he puts his tail between his hind legs and sneaks off like a dog that's been whipped fur stealin' victuals off the kitchen table, and keeps out

of sight and hearin' till everythin' is all right ag'in, leavin' other people to stand up and be boycotted and abused. Now, if that coward of a proprietor, with a ham sandwich for a soul, and a stale one at that, don't like the way things are being managed here, let him come out of his hole and say so to me. That's all I want. Let him come and tell *me* what he thinks about it!" And, with that, the old man brought his hand heavily down on the desk.

Mr. Stull was a strong man, especially in those mental faculties whose duty it was to guard his long-preserved secret, but his strength was scarcely equal to this occasion. If he had spoken a word he would have exploded like a dynamite bomb. All that he did was to turn away suddenly with a "Humph!" as if he had been wasting his valuable time in listening to this talk about matters in which he took no interest. He then stalked off, the condescension with which he stepped out of the way of an incoming customer being mingled with a ferocity which, had it been observed, must have been considered a singular combination.

Furious as was the mind of Mr. Stull, raging as it did by day and by night against the cruel fate which obliged him to bear these insults, these wrongs, and these treacheries without opening his mouth or moving his hand in his own defense, his mental turmoil did not prevent his regular attendance at Vatoldi's. He might, he thought, have staid away without exciting remark, for his absence would naturally be attributed to his disgust at the present state of affairs. But he could not stay away. He must go there, he

must see what that black-hearted scoundrel of a farmer was doing with his property. Since the departure of John People, no money had been paid in at the bank, the manager having probably neglected to inform his uncle of that part of the daily duties of the establishment. But Mr. Stull was not disturbed on this account. Monstrous as he considered Enoch Bullripple's conduct to be, he knew that the old man was perfectly honest, and he felt sure that he would account to John for all moneys expended, and hand over the surplus. That John himself was a defaulter was out of the question. Mr. Stull's constant supervision never gave him a chance to be dishonest, and he had made his regular deposit on the day he left. Stull also believed Enoch's statement that the young man had not betrayed his secret. No matter to what height his manager's stupid folly might rise, he still felt sure that he was to be trusted in this.

## CHAPTER X

R. CRISMAN spent a very pleasant Sunday at Cherry Bridge, and he detailed to the ladies, with much more satisfaction than if Mr. Stratford had been present, his yachting experiences of the previous week. These were by no means extraordinary experiences, but they were rather novel to Mr. Crisman, and he talked about them to his heart's content. Mrs. Justin's heart was content before she had heard the half of them; and Gay sometimes caught herself wondering if some of the things her lover told were of sufficient importance to deserve so much careful elucidation on his part and attention on her own. Of course she wanted to hear his adventures, but she was not very desirous to be told precisely how Pete Cummins and Charley Slocum sat together in the stern, and how Abe Henderson, who was just abaft the mast trying to smoke out one of those smuggled cigars which he had bought from a sailor on the Battery, sung out that there was a squall coming and would strike them on the port quarter in about six minutes, and that the best thing they could do was to put into the island until the blow was over, if they staid all night; and how everybody aboard, except Tom Wilson, knew

that there was no likelihood of a squall, or, if there was, Abe didn't know anything about it, and that Abe was just trying on the nautical to torment Tom Wilson, who was making himself comfortable on a roll of sail-cloth in the bow — this comical Tom Wilson having on a blue flannel shirt which he bought too big by mistake, and full nineteen inches in the collar, giving him the air of a lady going out to an evening party, and causing him to be particularly anxious not to go on shore and make a guy of himself, which, of course, he would be obliged to do if a squall came up.

It was not that this, and similar incidents, possessed no interest for her, but Gay's mind was a quick one, and could comprehend situations upon very terse presentations. Mr. Crisman's elaboration of minutiæ became, therefore, a little tiresome to her, although she did not acknowledge this to herself, and listened with such gentle attention that Mr. Crisman felt it was almost as pleasant to tell about these things as to be at the happening of them.

On Sunday morning he went to church with the two ladies, and in the afternoon he strolled with one, but the scent of the yacht trip hung around his conversation still. But he was so good-humored, so buoyant and hearty in his talk and manner, and withal so handsome, that Gay reproached herself every time there came stealing into her mind a sense of distaste for small vessels on salt water. It was a quiet, uneventful day, but Mrs. Justin and Gay Armatt enjoyed it very much. The conditions for enjoyment were so exactly what they ought to be, and it appeared so just, right, and perfectly natural that the

presence of Mr. Crisman should give pleasure not only to Gay, but to her dear friend, that the pleasure came to these two ladies as the delightful consciousness of virtue comes to the virtuous.

When Gay took her charming, beaming face upstairs that night, she sat by the window and looked out into her future — her future with Charley Crisman. It was very bright, brighter than the sunset. It was full of glowing visions of a voyage, not in a little boat upon a bay, but in a great ship upon the rolling ocean; of far-away and lovely lands; of the weird charms of foreign life, and the mountains and plains whence trickled the headwaters of literature; and through these visionary scenes she moved with Charley, hand in hand, until at last they came to a lovely rural home, which, after all, would be more charming than the ruins of the past or the palaces of to-day.

And then she rose, and the future faded, and in its stead she saw the sky, and there were some stars there which reminded her of the stars which had come twinkling out the week before, when she had walked home after dark from the hill where she had seen the sunset. And now it came into her mind that, for some reason or other, she did not know exactly why, it was more pleasant for Mr. Stratford not to be here on the Sundays Charley was here. This was very odd, and she did not try to explain it to herself. And so, with the Charley-smile still upon her lips, she went to bed.

Mr. Crisman did not immediately retire, but, lighting a cigar, he went out on the piazza to have a walk and a smoke, and to build some castles in the air.

His thoughts went immediately forth to a medium-sized frame house, probably in the Queen Anne style, somewhere in the suburbs of the city. From the parlor and dining-room floor to a room in the attic which he intended to fit up with a work-bench, at which he could make all sorts of little things that would be needed about the house, he furnished this home. To be sure, he could not expect to be in it very much on week-days; for, as he had to be at the store at nine o'clock in the morning, and as it would take him at least an hour to reach the city, he would have to have his breakfast at half-past seven, and therefore get up at seven; and, as for coming home, he could not hope to reach the house before dark, except in the long summer days. But then there would be Sundays and holidays; and even on ordinary days, if they did not sit up too late, he could rise in the morning quite early enough to have a good time working in the garden and getting an appetite for his breakfast. He knew lots of fellows who lived out of town who did that. In some way or other, they really seemed to have more time to do things than his friends who lived in the city.

As to Gay, he pictured her as the most charming mistress of a house that the world ever saw. He did not suppose that she had any domestic abilities, for she could gain nothing of these while she was grinding away at school and at college; but all that sort of thing would soon come to her, as it does to every woman who is worth anything. Of course they would have a servant, but there would be lots for Gay to do to keep her busy and contented while he

was away. For one thing, he would have a poultry-house and yard, and the care of the hens and chickens would give Gay no end of fun and occupation. He saw her, in his mind's eye, collecting the snow-white eggs, and tenderly caring for the downy little chicks. If his circumstances improved,— and there was reason to believe that, if he married, he would be promoted into the foreign woolens department,— he would have a cow, although, now he came to think of it, a good cow ought to give at least ten quarts of milk a day, and what he and Gay were to do with ten quarts of milk he could not see, unless, indeed, they churned, and, by George! that was a jolly idea! They would make their own butter, and Gay should have charge of it. He was glad Gay was not a rich girl, because she would take so much more pleasure in all this sort of thing than she would if she had been rich. She would find that she would have a lot to learn that they didn't teach in college. But, when she once came to give her mind to it, he knew very well that she would get along splendidly.

And then, throwing away the stump of his cigar, Mr. Crisman danced twice up and down the piazza, holding out his arms as if he were waltzing with Gay. And having finished this exercise, he went into the house, locked the hall-door, and betook himself to bed.

Mrs. Justin did not have a very long rest that night. She never could sleep when any one was walking up and down the piazza under her window; and when Gay married Mr. Crisman — and to-day Mrs. Justin had no doubt that this would happen — she hoped that she would cure him of this practice.

When Mr. Crisman had gone, and the week of ordinary life had begun again at Cherry Bridge, Gay let one day pass without saying anything on the subject, and then she asked Mrs. Justin if she did not think it somewhat strange that Mr. Stratford had not called upon them since he went back to the farm-house.

"It has been scarcely three days since he was here," said Mrs. Justin, "and I do not think that can be considered a very long absence."

"That depends," said Gay. "It is only a half-hour drive for him. Have the people at the farm returned yet?"

"I have not heard that they have returned," said Mrs. Justin.

"Well, then," said Gay, thoughtfully, "from what you said about the state of the farm household when you invited the two gentlemen here, I should think he must be having a very uncomfortable time of it."

Mrs. Justin possessed an excellent temper, but this remark irritated her. She felt that Gay was not called upon to interest herself in Mr. Stratford's welfare. And, more than that, she perceived in Gay's words something of a reproach to herself. Her conscience told her this was not altogether undeserved. Affairs must be going on roughly at the farm, with no one but a very incompetent woman to manage the household, and it did not at all conform to her high ideas of hospitality to allow an old friend, such as Mr. Stratford was, to remain in discomfort, with her own large house so near. But Stratford's intentions and conduct made it impossible for her to have him

at her house while Gay was there. But that was no reason why the duties of friendship should be entirely neglected. She then remarked that she intended to drive over to the farm and find out when Mrs. People was expected back and how matters were going on there.

"I will go with you," said Gay.

Now did the irritation of Mrs. Justin increase so much that she was unable to conceal it, and she answered in a tone more severe than she had ever before used towards her young friend:

"It is not at all necessary, Gay, that you should visit the farm. I am going to the village this morning, and will then drive over and see if Mr. Stratford needs anything that I can do for him."

Gay could not fail to perceive that Mrs. Justin did not approve of her putting herself forward in the cause of Mr. Stratford's welfare, but she was not offended, though she said no more upon the subject. It might be that her friend was sensitive about having other people interfere in a case like this, which was clearly within her own province; and as Gay considered the matter, she thought of several other things which might have induced Mrs. Justin to set her aside in this affair. But Gay's considerations of these possible reasons did not in the slightest degree diminish her interest in Mr. Stratford.

Mrs. Justin was not only irritated but disappointed. Mr. Crisman's last visit had produced the impression upon her that perhaps, after all, there was no reason for her fears in regard to Stratford. The lovers appeared so happy and content in each other's company

that even if Mr. Stratford found further opportunities of interfering with their engagement, he would discover that he had no ground to work on. As soon as he had gone, Gay had ceased to think of him, and had returned to her allegiance to the man she was to marry. But now Crisman was scarcely out of the house when Gay was filled with anxiety about Mr. Stratford's domestic comfort, and with disappointment that he did not come to see her. All this was very disheartening to Mrs. Justin. Mr. Stratford was out when she called at the farm-house, but her inquiries convinced her that he was probably doing very well, as it was evident that he had taken the general direction of his domestic economies into his own hands. She gave the woman in charge some advice in regard to the gentleman's comfort, but she made no report of her proceeding when she returned.

Gay asked no further questions about Mr. Stratford, and she and her friend soon returned to their ordinary condition of amicable intercourse. It was Mrs. Justin's custom to leave her visitors free to spend the mornings as they best pleased, and to claim that privilege for herself. The next morning Gay pleased not to read or study. She was restless and thoughtful, and concluded that she would take a walk. So she walked over the fields and hills to the little eminence where she had seen the sunset. She climbed up to the broad rail where she had sat, and she sat there again and looked at the sky. The sky was blue now, with white clouds floating over it, but it was not a very interesting sky, and Gay got down from the fence on the other side from that on which

she had climbed up. Then she walked on into a country which was new to her, and in which she experienced some of the sensations of the adventurer, for she knew she was not now on Mrs. Justin's land.

She kept on until she came to the bottom of a hill, where there was a little brook; and when she had rested herself by its banks a few minutes, watching the hurrying water as it pushed around and between and over the big stones which lay in its course, she stepped upon one or two of the driest of these stones, and was over the brook in a flash. She followed the opposite bank of the stream around the end of a low hill, and then she found herself in a pretty little valley with this mountain stream running down the middle of it. Not far away there was a clump of trees by the side of the brook, and just above these a man was fishing.

Almost as soon as she saw this man Gay knew it was Mr. Stratford. She stopped, uncertain whether or not to go on. Before the conversation of yesterday she would not have hesitated for a moment, but would have hurried, as fast as she could run, to see Mr. Stratford fish; but now a recollection of the words and, still more, the manner, of Mrs. Justin produced a vague impression upon her mind that she ought, perhaps, to turn around and go back the way she came. But instantly she began to ask herself what possible reason there was for this impression. What was there in Mrs. Justin's words or manner which should prevent her from speaking to Mr. Stratford when she saw him? If he happened to turn his head she would be full in his view, and if he saw her

going away what would he think of her? She would be treating him as if he were some stranger to be avoided. It would be most unkind and improper in her to behave to him in an unfriendly way, and so she would go on and speak to him.

This she did, but she did not run. She walked very sedately over the grass; and when she came near him he heard the slight rustling of her dress, and turned.

"Good-morning, Mr. Stratford," she said. "Shall I frighten the fish if I come there?"

Mr. Stratford was surprised, but very glad to see Gay. He put down his rod, and came forward to greet her. He said it did not matter in the least whether she frightened the fish or not, and wanted to know how she had happened to come this way.

When this had been explained, Gay begged him to go on with his fishing, because nothing would so much delight her as to see how he caught a trout. Thereupon they both approached the brook, and while Gay stood a little to one side, Mr. Stratford took up his rod and began with much dexterity to throw his fly among the ripples at the bottom of a tiny waterfall. In a few moments he caught a trout and threw it out upon the grass; then Gay ran up to it, dropped down on her knees, and was full of admiration for its beautiful colors and spots. If it had been Mr. Crisman who was fishing, Gay would have implored him to throw the poor little thing back into the water, but in regard to a fish hooked by Mr. Stratford she had no such thought. If he caught it, it was of course quite right that he should do so.

And now Mr. Stratford asked her if she would like to fish. Gay declared that she would be perfectly delighted to do so, but unfortunately she did not know how; she had never fished since she was a little girl, and then in the most primitive way, with worms. She had heard and read a good deal about artificial flies, but she had never before seen any one use them. Thereupon Mr. Stratford took out his book of flies, and showed Gay the various kinds of feather insects, and told her when and why he used this variety or that. Then she was very anxious to begin, and Stratford put the rod into her hands, explained the use of the reel, and going a little farther along the brook, he began to give her lessons in managing the rod, throwing the fly, and in various other branches of trout-fishing. Gay's business in life was to learn, and she was so bright and quick at seeing what ought to be done, and Stratford was so earnest and patient in teaching, that after half an hour's practice she could make a fly skim above the surface of the water with something which resembled in a certain degree the skill of a practiced fisher.

In the course of time a trout actually rose to her fly, and she hooked it. With a wild, spasmodic jerk, which would have broken her tackle had the fish been a large one, she threw it far out on the grass, the line just grazing Mr. Stratford's hat as it flew over his head. She was now in raptures, and she fished on with much zest, although her success was small.

And so Gay did all the fishing, for Mr. Stratford assured her that he could fish any day, and that it

was ever so much more pleasure to show her how to use the rod than to use it himself. And they walked and they talked, and Gay declared that she had found out something which was not taught in colleges, and that was that the way to superoxygenate the air was to fish. The atmosphere seemed truly full of exhilaration, and not only she herself, but everything else, seemed to be breathing it with delight.

"I wish Izaak Walton had written his book in Greek," cried Gay, "for then I would put it among my Greek reading next winter, and in that way keep before my mind this fussy little brook with real fishing fish in it. And now won't you show me again how to give that little wobble to the fly as I wave it?"

And so Mr. Stratford took Gay's little hand into his own, she still holding the rod, and the fly on the end of the line began to wobble itself more over the water, and less over the grass.

At length Stratford stopped and took out his watch. "I think, Miss Armatt," he said, "that we must now give up fishing for to-day. You will have just time enough to get home to luncheon."

"You don't mean to say," exclaimed Gay, "that it is nearly one o'clock!"

"It is half-past twelve," said Stratford, "but I can show you a much shorter way to Mrs. Justin's house than that by which you came."

And now the little feather fly was put away with its brothers, the rod was disjointed and packed up, and Gay and Stratford walked along one edge of the stream until they came to a good place to cross, when he, with one foot upon a rock and the other on the

bank, took both her hands in his, and she made a flying skip over the brook without any need of a stepping-stone. They now followed the course of the valley until they came to a fence, in one panel of which were movable bars, and these being taken down by Mr. Stratford, Gay passed through. Then he put them up again, but remained on the other side from her.

"Now all you have to do," he said, "is to keep straight on until you get to the corner of that bit of wood. When you have turned that, you will see the house before you at the bottom of a long hill."

"But are you not coming to take luncheon with us?" said Gay. "I thought, of course, you'd do that!"

"Oh, no," replied Stratford, with a smile. "I couldn't lunch with ladies in these fishing clothes and muddy boots."

"The clothes are quite good enough," said Gay; "and I am sure that Mrs. Justin won't like it at all when she hears you have been so near and wouldn't stop to luncheon."

Stratford smiled, but shook his head.

"Then you will come to-morrow?" said Gay. "You haven't been to see us for ever so long; and I have six pages marked, on which there are things I want to ask you about."

Mr. Stratford stood by the fence, leaning on the upper rail. "Miss Armatt," he said, "I shall not be able to visit you to-morrow. In fact, as I am going to the city in a day or two, it will be some time before I can give myself the pleasure of calling at Mrs. Justin's house."

"I don't see what going to the city in a day or two has to do with it," said Gay, "when you live so near."

Stratford laughed, but made no answer to this remark. "You must not think, Miss Armatt," he said, "that I have any intention of evading those six marked pages. But I must not keep you here any longer, or Mrs. Justin will think you are lost. Good-bye, for just now." And he reached out his hand over the fence.

Gay put her hand in his, and as she did so she said nothing, but looked straight into his eyes with an expression full of interrogation.

"Good-bye," he said again. And then he gently dropped her hand, and she went her way.

Gay's way was now a thoughtful one, and her thoughts could have been formulated to express the idea that the best plan to expel the oxygen from the air was to have Mr. Stratford say the things he had been saying. There was something wrong, and she could not understand it. In fact, she soon gave up trying to understand it; and her mind, for the greater part of the walk home, was entirely occupied with the contemplation of the fact that never in her life had she met any one who, in certain respects, could be compared to Mr. Stratford as a companion. It was not merely that he knew so much about all sorts of things; it was a good deal more than that. His mind seemed to possess the quality of hospitality; it seemed to open its doors to you, to ask you to come in and make yourself at home; and you could not help going in and making yourself at home — at least

Gay could not. And she did not want to help it, either. She had never known any one on whom, in certain respects, it was such a pleasure to depend as Mr. Stratford. Even when he helped her over the brook, or showed her how to use a fishing-rod, there was something encouraging and inspiriting in his very touch.

And yet Gay's thoughts and sentiments in regard to Mr. Stratford did not interfere in the least with her thoughts and sentiments regarding Mr. Crisman. These were on a different plane, and in a different sphere. She did not exactly say this to herself, but reflections of similar significance passed across her mind, and being of such easy comprehension, were not detained for consideration.

When Mrs. Justin heard where Gay had been, with whom she had met, how she had fished, how she had enjoyed it, what a perfectly lovely morning it had been, what a charming thing it was to have a man like Mr. Stratford teach one how to fish, how Mr. Stratford had declined to come to lunch, and a good deal of what he had said on this and other subjects, that lady listened in silence; her face was grave, and her heart was pained. She felt that Fate was against her in the effort she was making in behalf of the right. When she spoke she said few words in regard to Mr. Stratford's visit to the city, and then changed the subject. In the course of an hour or two a basket of trout was sent over from the Bullripple farm, and they were cooked for dinner; but Gay noticed that Mrs. Justin, who, as she knew, was very fond of trout, partook not of this dish.

Mrs. Justin's peace of mind was not increased when, next morning, she received a letter from Arthur Thorne requesting her permission to address Miss Armatt. Mr. Thorne wrote that he was aware that Mrs. Justin was not related to Miss Armatt, nor was she that young lady's guardian, but as Miss Armatt was at present a member of her family, he would consider it an instance of bad social faith were he to carry out his present intention of securing board in her neighborhood for the express purpose of visiting Mrs. Justin's house and endeavoring to win favor in the eyes of Miss Armatt, without frankly apprising Mrs. Justin of said intention. The letter closed with an earnest hope that this proposed step would meet with Mrs. Justin's approval.

"Is it possible," exclaimed the lady as she rose to her feet, with this letter crushed in her hand, "that Stratford has never told his friend of Mr. Crisman?"

For an hour Mrs. Justin walked the floor, this matter galloping through her mind, and then she sat down and wrote a letter to Mr. Thorne informing him of Gay's engagement to Mr. Crisman. She did allude to the strangeness of the fact that he had not heard of this, and she made her letter as kind and as appreciative of honorable motives as she believed such a truly honorable man as Arthur Thorne deserved.

## CHAPTER XI

HE cyclones and the typhoons still continued to rage through the soul of J. Weatherby Stull as he daily visited Vatoldi's and beheld the performances of Enoch Bullripple. Whatever deed an absolute fool might do, that, in the eyes of Mr. Stull, did Enoch, and whatever a wise man might perform, that thing Enoch left undone. With John People gone he knew not whither, and not a soul on earth with whom he could share his misery and rage, Mr. Stull's condition was such that every hour threatened the downfall of Mr. Bullripple, and the simultaneous toppling over of the lofty social pedestal of the Stull family. But the head of the family had made that pedestal his only object of adoration, and it was that adoration which, time after time, saved the pedestal from the destruction threatened by its builder.

As has been said, Mr. Stull came every day to Vatoldi's, but he no longer brought his family, nor urged them to come. That restaurant, with its swaggering waiters and its flaunting placards of "Chowder" and "Golden Buck," was no place for them. In its present condition he did not wish to see the place patronized. He went there himself because he must know

what was going on, but he would have been very glad if no one else had gone. Attracted by Enoch's showy inducements, and by the notoriety which the boycotters had given to the place, a great many persons took their meals at Vatoldi's. But they were not the former patrons of the establishment. They belonged to a much lower social sphere; and, had circumstances permitted, it would have delighted the soul of Mr. Stull to take each one of them by the neck and put him out into the street, and then to close the shutters of Vatoldi's and lock and bar its doors, keeping them closed and barred until affairs could be so ordered that he could re-open his old establishment upon its old basis of order, propriety, and systematic excellence.

One afternoon Mr. Horace Stratford arrived in town, and being very desirous to obtain news of his landlord and landlady, from whom he had received but two very unsatisfactory notes, he repaired directly to Vatoldi's. When he reached the place he was surprised to see a crowd before the door, who regarded with much lively interest a man who was taking a meal at a small table placed on the sidewalk directly in front of one of the large windows. Over this man's head hung a placard, on which was inscribed:

"YESTERDAY THE BOYCOTTERS GAVE ME
TWO DOLLARS
TO PLAY SHAM, AND TO-DAY I AM PAID
THREE DOLLARS
TO EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY."

Mr. Stratford did not stop to ask questions; but, seeing Mrs. People inside the door, he immediately walked in and accosted her. The good woman's face was beaming with the pleasure which frequently follows a benevolent action. A big policeman — all sorts of people now came to Vatoldi's — had just been partaking of a repast at a table near the door, and Mrs. People, who had been temporarily left in charge of the cashier's desk, and who liked to encourage the patronage of policemen in these troublous times, had cut a large slice of one of her own cherry pies, and had taken it to him with her own hands as a gratuitous addition to his meal.

"That's from me," she said, in her brusque, cheerful way. "It's all right. Don't mention it." And then she bustled back to the desk.

When the policeman came up to pay the amount of his check, Mrs. People, who was not an adept at addition and subtraction, gave him his change with a deficiency in the amount which was larger than the price of the piece of pie. The good policeman perceived the error, but hesitated a little before mentioning it to a person who had just been so generous to him. He stood for a moment undecided whether to speak or not, when Mrs. People exclaimed:

"Now, don't say anything about that pie. That's all right. Did you think it was good? It ought to be, for I made it myself." And then, with a jolly little nod, she turned aside to speak to a waiter, and the policeman, in a state of uncertain gratefulness, departed.

The glow of kindliness upon Mrs. People's countenance brightened into the radiance of joy when she

beheld Mr. Stratford. With outstretched hand she hurried to meet him, and poured forth an instantaneous torrent of questions regarding his welfare at the farm, broken by great bowlders of regret at the unfortunate state of affairs which obliged her to leave him there alone.

It was an hour when there were few persons in the long room; but had the place been crowded, it would have been all the same to Mrs. People.

After a time Mr. Stratford began to ask questions. "This place seems very much changed," he said, looking about him. "Has boycotting done all this?"

"The dear knows what it has done, and what it hasn't done," said Mrs. People. "Enoch attends to the upstairs business, and I have my hands full tryin' to keep things straight in the kitchen. He is out now, and so I had to come up here; but he'll be back directly, and mighty glad he'll be to see you."

"What is the meaning," asked Stratford, "of that man eating at a table outside, with the people standing along the curb-stone looking at him?"

"Oh, that's one of Enoch's contrivances," said Mrs. People, with a laugh. "Yesterday the boycotters hired that man to come in here and get somethin' to eat; and, dear knows, they didn't give him money to git much; and when he had finished, he went out on the pavement right in front of the door, and bent himself nearly double, and began to howl as if he was suff'rin', and to holler out that he'd been p'izened by what had been given him to eat in here. As true as I live, sir, 'twasn't more'n half a minute before there was a crowd outside, a-blockin' up the pavement;

and where they came from so quick I don't know; and that man in the middle of them a-howlin' and groanin' and shakin' his fist at the people in here for p'izenin' of him. It wouldn't 'a' been two minutes before there'd been a row, and windows broke, for all I know, but the very second that Enoch sat eyes on the man and saw what was up, he made one dash out the front door, and grabbed the feller by the collar, and pulled him inside in no time. Then two of the waiters they took the man one by each arm and Enoch pushin' behind, and they whisked him out lively into the little back-yard, and then they got him down right flat on the bricks, and Enoch he called for a big bottle of olive oil to give to him quick to stop the p'izen. Then the feller he got frightened, not knowin' what he'd be made to take, and he sung out that he wasn't p'izened at all, and that 'twas all sham. Then Enoch he sent the waiters away and let the man up, and then and there he made a bargain with him; and as he had been hired yesterday to make believe he was sick, Enoch hired him to come to-day and set out in front of the shop and eat, and let people see that the victuals we furnish here agree with him. Enoch has give orders that they're to take victuals out to him a little at a time, so's he can be kep' eatin' all day. This mornin' some boycotter's boys threw mud at him, but the perlice ketched 'em, and there was an end to that. And here comes Enoch now."

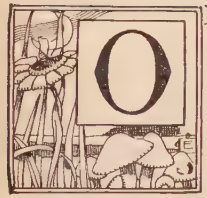
Mr. Bullripple was quite as glad to see his boarder as Mrs. People had been, and the two sat down at a table and had a long talk on the state of affairs. Mr. Stratford was greatly interested in Enoch's account

of what he had done, for the old man told him everything, even to his method of getting rid of John People in order to have a clear field to work in.

"You see, sir," said Enoch, "what I'm about is a good sight deeper than what folks is likely to think that jus' looks at it from the outside. There's a rat in a hole in this Vatoldi business, and all these things that surprise you about the place is the stick that I'm tryin' to punch him out with; and I think that feller eatin' outside has just made the stick about long enough to reach the mean, sneakin' varmint at the bottom of his hole. I'm almost dead sure I tetched him, for if he didn't stick out his head this mornin', I'm wuss mistaken than I ever was before in my life. I'm pretty sure that it won't be long now before I'll have him. And then, if I choose, Mr. Stratford,— I don't say that I'm goin' to do it, but I can do it, if I like,— I'm of the opinion I can show you your hundredth man. For if there's one man that sticks out sharp from any hundred people you know, it's this one I'm after."

"I have a very strong notion, Enoch," said Mr. Stratford, "if you catch the person you call your rat, and bring him to me yourself, that I shall see my hundredth man."

## CHAPTER XII



N the day of Mr. Stratford's arrival in the city, and very soon after he had parted from Enoch Bullripple, the latter received a letter from his nephew, John People. It was a long letter, and full of indignation and reproach. In the strongest terms which John's sense of duty would allow him to use towards a respected relative, he protested against the injustice and injury which had been done him by the unwarrantable trick played upon him by his uncle. Mr. Bullripple's letter had assured him that it was all intended for his good, but this declaration made no impression on John. He had been ruthlessly forced to break his faith with his employer, and to desert and neglect the interests which had been intrusted to him. Nothing on earth could have tempted him voluntarily to do what he had been tricked into doing. Instead of this enforced absence being a benefit to him, he felt sure it would work him an injury. He had written to his employer explaining the whole affair, but he had no reason to believe that his explanations would clear him from condemnation by that person; and disaster, both to his fortune and to the busi-

ness, must certainly result from his uncle's deplorable action.

John further stated that, instead of writing, he would have hastened home himself, but that he had no money by which to come by rail, and that the steamer on which he had a return ticket would not start North for several days. He had written for money to be telegraphed to him, and would be in the city at the earliest possible moment.

When Mr. Bullripple had read this letter his countenance was not that of a man whose conscience had been touched by the reproaches of one he had wronged. On the contrary, he allowed himself a smile of much content as he folded the letter and slipped it into an inner pocket of his coat.

"Written to the boss, has he!" he said to himself. "That's all right; and now we'll wait and see what happens next. If the boss can stand that punch without comin' out of his hole and showin' himself, he's got more grit than anybody I've met yit on this planet."

The fact that John had not been able immediately to set out on his return to the city was a comfort and relief to the soul of Mr. Bullripple, for he had found that the task of ferreting out the concealed proprietor of Vatoldi's was more difficult than he had expected it to be, and for the past day or two he had feared that his nephew might make his appearance and prevent the successful working out of his plans. But now there was some time yet in which, with his perceptive faculties keener than ever, he could keep a sharp lookout for the other man to whom John had

When Mr. Stull received his letter it was a happy thing for him that he was alone, for he fairly roared with fury. He had thought that his detestation of Enoch Bullripple could not be greater than it had become during the time that the old man had had sole charge of Vatoldi's; but now Mr. Stull found that he had been mistaken. Nothing that Bullripple had done could compare with this act of demoniacal villainy. If ever a man had been revenged on another, he would be revenged on this old farmer. It was not necessary for him to show himself, nor to do anything at the present moment. It would not be long before John People would return, and then he could act, as before, unseen and unknown. The first thing he would do would be to order his manager immediately to send his uncle and his mother to their home in the country; and then Mr. Stull determined to devote all the energy of his intellect to schemes by which that reprobate of a Bullripple should be made to suffer for his sins, without knowing who caused him his pangs and his agony. There were weak places in Mr. Bullripple's affairs which Stull knew, and it was at these spots he intended to strike until he had reached the very heart of his victim.

During the rest of that day, and a great part of the night, the mind of Mr. Stull was almost entirely given over to schemes for the ruin of the man who in such scoundrelly fashion had thrust himself into his path.

The next day, he lunched at Vatoldi's, as was his custom. No matter what happened, he said to himself, he would make no change in his ordinary habits, and give no one reason to suppose that what

was occurring there was of the slightest concern to him.

But the difficulty of restraining himself to his prescribed line of action was now greater than he ever imagined it could be. To look at Enoch Bullripple without hurling knives, forks, and imprecations at him induced a strain which few minds except that of J. Weatherby Stull could have withstood. He ate with assumed appetite the meal which he had ordered, and no knives, forks, or imprecations flew through the air. But his soul writhed, groaned, and gritted its teeth within him, and he longed for the coming of John People, and the beginning of his vengeance. Not only the uncle, but the nephew, should suffer. He had to be very careful in his treatment of the only person who held his secret, but he would not allow himself to forget that John had been weak and foolish enough to be led away by a most flimsy trick from his post of duty at a time when it was so necessary that he should be there. Mr. Stull had not yet determined how John should be punished, but that this punishment should take place he most solemnly promised himself.

Mr. Stull was a man who, if he had anything to do, liked to go to work and do it as soon as possible; and the very next morning, he set on foot some particular inquiries in regard to the tenure by which Enoch held his farm. He thought that said tenure probably resembled that by which he held his own farm; and, if this should prove to be the case, he had conceived a plan by which the meddling old man

could be brought to a just punishment, and that, too, without knowing who had brought it upon him.

He ate his luncheon at Vatoldi's that day with a good appetite, for the prospect of making himself even with old Enoch, and the knowledge that John would very soon return, had restored his mental and physical systems to something of their ordinary condition. His indignation against Enoch received, however, fresh fuel to-day. New placards had been hung upon the wall, one announcing that certain puddings would be furnished with "Boycotter Sauce"; and the general vulgarity and low tone of the place seemed to be on the increase. Before the receipt of John People's letter, Mr. Stull had believed old Bullripple to be a stupid blunderer, who, knowing nothing of the business he had undertaken, had done everything in the way it should not be done; but now he believed him to be a designing rascal, who, hating anything better than that to which he was accustomed, was taking a vicious delight in pulling Vatoldi's down to his own level, for nothing but the depraved love of power, and the desire to make the restaurant what his groveling soul thought it ought to be, could have induced the old man to take so much trouble to get his nephew out of the way.

Shortly before three o'clock that afternoon, Mr. Stull was astounded, almost paralyzed, in fact, by beholding the entrance, unheralded by announcement or knock, of Enoch Bullripple into his private room at the bank. His astonishment was instantly succeeded by an influx of savage fury at this intrusion,

and, rising to his feet, he was about to launch his indignation against the old man, but Enoch spoke first. Holding out a large wallet stuffed with bank notes, the exuberance of which was restrained by a piece of twine, he said:

"I want to know, Mr. Stull, what I'm to do with this money. There hain't been none deposited in the bank since John went away, and there's a good deal more of it now than ought to be kep' in that little safe under the desk. Now, I don't know whether I'm to deposit it in John's name, or in your name. You know I haven't got no account at this bank."

Mr. Stull sat down. His face was gray, his eyes were wide open. Mr. Bullripple took a chair on the opposite side of the table, on which he laid the wallet.

"Sick?" said he, looking over at the other.

Stull's face now began to work. "What do you—what do you mean," he stammered, "by bringing that to me?" And he made a faint motion as if he would push the wallet from the table.

Enoch leaned back in his chair, half closed his eyes, and grinned. "It appears to me," he said, "that the man that owns a lot of money is the best person to ask what's got to be done with it. Game's up, Jonathan Stull," he added. "'Tain't no more use keepin' in your hole; you might jus' as well walk right out and show yourself."

Dumb, gray, and open-eyed, Mr. Stull still stared at the old man. One thought only filled his mind: that arch-fiend on the other side of the table possessed his secret. When John People was his only confidant Mr. Stull had felt safe and satisfied. The incalcu-

lable importance of secrecy had been made known to John. The young man was honest and faithful, and he would as soon have thought of stealing his employer's money as of betraying his sacred confidence.

But now the secret was known to a black-hearted wretch. Mr. Stull said nothing, because no words would come to him; but it was unnecessary to say anything. No questioning was needed to make him see plainer than he saw now that Enoch Bullripple knew that he was the owner of Vatoldi's.

The old man had no intention of forcing his victim to express himself, nor of prolonging the interview merely to enjoy his triumph, and he proceeded at once to business. "Now, Jonathan Stull," he said, leaning forward on the table, "you and me has got somethin' to talk about, and the sooner we git at it the better. You're a good deal took back, I can see, and don't appear to be ready to be very glib with your words. But that ain't needed. All you've got to do jus' now is to listen; and when I'm through, and you've come a little to your senses, you can tell me what you've made up your mind to do."

It may be here remarked that not for one moment did Mr. Stull suspect that John had betrayed him to Bullripple. The tone of the young man's letter to him, and the fact that his uncle found it necessary to get rid of him, made it plain to Mr. Stull that John's integrity had not been shaken. He knew, as well as if he had been told, that in some way he had betrayed himself to that sharp-eyed old wolf who was now glaring at him. A tidal wave of rage came rolling back upon him. It was necessary to restrain

himself, but he could look upon Enoch only as a venomous creature from whom it was difficult to withhold a blow.

"Be quick," he said savagely. "What do you want? Is it that?" And he pointed to the wallet.

Enoch struck the table with his fist. He, too, was roused, but he felt under no restraint. "Get out with you!" he said. "What do you suppose I want with your pancake and molasses money? But I'll let you know what I do want — and in short order too. It's not been very long since I've found out that the person who was working my nephew John by day and by night, and givin' him mighty little for it and no show for himself, was a mean sneak, who, for some reason or other, was afraid to show his face, even when his own business was goin' to rack and ruin; and ever sence this was made clear and plain to me, I've jus' given myself up to the business of rooting out that feller, and have left my farm to be took charge of by a hired man; and how much I've lost I don't know, nor I don't keer, for I've got him out. He's settin' right here in front of me. By George!" the old man exclaimed, while an enormous grin elevated his wrinkled cheeks, "you must 'a' been tored up wuss than a sassafras field that's bein' grubbed and plowed when you seed me turnin' your eatin' house upside down, and a-doin' everythin' I knowed was agin the creed and catechism of whoever it was who owned the place. It took a good deal longer to fetch that rat out than I thought it would, fur he had more grit than I give him credit fur. But I did it. By George! I did it. When I got John's

letter, and he said he'd wrote to the owner, I says to myself, 'That feller's bound to show up now, if ever he does.' And, sure enough, he did. I'd had my eye on you for a good while, though there was times when I thought you couldn't be fool enough to let me rip and stave jus' as I pleased, without ever liftin' your finger or sayin' a word. But from what I'd had to do with you afore, I knowed you was the man to do anythin' mean and sneakin' if it was called fur; and your comin' there so constant made me suspicion you. It wasn't like you to be eatin' every day in a place like that if there wasn't a better reason for it than what you said about your allus bein' in the habit of comin'. And yesterday, when you got John's letter, you came in a-glarin' like a two-eyed locomotive, and I could 'a' swore before an alderman you was the man. But I wasn't quite ready to come out on you, fur I hadn't got my accounts all squared up. But I was glad I waited, for the way you looked at me this day while you was eatin' made the thing as sure as if you'd gone before an alderman and swore it. And here I am; and there's the money on hand, up to two o'clock to-day; and inside the wallet is a statement of all I've took in and all I've spent. And now I'll come to the p'int. If you've got any reason fur keepin' yourself hid and out of sight, that's your affair, and not mine. But if you want me to keep mum about it, you've got to come to my terms, and them's these: John must be took into the business, and have a decent share of the profits; and he's not to be kep' slavin' at it neither, but he's to have help enough so's he can git off now and then, like other

people. I've made up my mind that he's to have a clean two weeks to begin with, to come down into the country to see his mother and me. That trip down South ain't to be counted in at all. He didn't git no pleasure out of it, and it jus' went in in the way of business. What in the name of common sense made him stick to you as he has stuck is more than I can tell. It's out and out beyond me. But he's got to be paid for it now. As soon as he comes home I'm goin' to set the whole thing fair and square before him, and I'll see to it that you and him makes out the right kind of a contract. Now, then, Jonathan Stull, you see what's before you. And if you back out, and say you are not the owner of Vatoldi's — well, then, by George! John and me will keep the place and run it ourselves until the real owner turns up. There's the money; and what have you got to say?"

Into the gloomy ferocity of Mr. Stull's soul there entered a gleam of satisfaction. The scheme of the old man was not one of simple malicious vengeance. He wanted something. He desired to make a bargain. This showed a way out of the difficulty. The bargain could be entered into, and everything go on as before; and Mr. Stull had confidence enough in his own ability to feel sure that he could carry out the plan of vengeance he had devised. He did not strongly object to giving John a moderate share in the business. On some accounts it might be a very wise thing to do. But, whatever arrangement might be made, and whatever good might come of it, he would never forgive the wretched old scoundrel who

had ferreted out his secret and forced himself into his affairs.

He stood up suddenly, almost overturning his chair as he did so. Seizing the bulging wallet with one hand, he waved the other towards the door. "Now you can go!" he snarled to Enoch.

Mr. Bullripple did not immediately move. "I'll go when I'm ready," he said. "And, as I've nothin' more to say, I'll go now. And you see to it, Jonathan Stull, when I come to you about that contract, that you're ready to make it."

Thereupon he slowly rose and went out. He knew his man would be ready.

The next evening, Mr. Bullripple called upon Mr. Stratford at his city apartments to inform that gentleman that he and Mrs. People would return next morning to the farm-house, where they would be glad to welcome their friend and lodger as soon as he chose to return, and to make him as comfortable as he had been accustomed to be in their house.

"We've been away a good deal longer than we expected," said Enoch, "and I hope you didn't feel yourself druv to come to town."

"Not at all," said Mr. Stratford. "I should have come to the city in any case. But how have you succeeded in the complicated scheme of which you told me the other day? And are you ready to show me my hundredth man?"

"Oh, I've got him! I've got him!" cried Enoch, his eyes sparkling. "But the mischief of it is, I can't show him to you. It would jus' tickle me to death

if I could p'int him out, but things is fixed so it can't be done."

"I suppose, from what you told me the other day," said Stratford, "that you have discovered the owner of Vatoldi's."

"That's the feller!" cried Enoch. "And, by George! he squealed when I made him come out of his hole. But out he came, and I fixed it all right with him. And I tell you, Mr. Stratford, if I could take you where that man is, and p'int him out, and let you know what he's done and what he didn't do, you'd say, 'Enoch Bullripple, that's my hundredth man, and I needn't look no further.'"

Mr. Stratford laughed. "And yet you can't show him?" said he.

"No, sir," said Enoch. "I've agreed to let him go back in his hole, and have promised not to rout him out no more so long as he sticks to what he says he'll do. But I've made a pretty good thing of it for John. He's to have a share in the business, and has got to be treated more like a man and less like a plow-horse."

"Did John agree to your stepping in in this way," inquired Stratford, "and arranging his affairs for him in this extraordinary fashion?"

"He couldn't do nothin' else but agree to it," said Enoch. "I got my thumb on both of 'em, and if either of 'em had skipped from under, all I had to do was to wash my hands of the whole business, and to tell you and everybody else what I'd found out; and that would 'a' knocked the eatin' house proprietor higher'n a kite. And John knowed it. He was as

mad as hops when he got back last night, but that didn't hurt nobody; and this afternoon he and the other feller jus' walked up to the scratch, and the contract between 'em was signed and sealed. And that's why me and Mrs. People is goin' home, havin' no more to do here, and lots to do there. And I hope it won't be long before you'll be comin' too."

"You'll see me in a day or two," said Stratford; "and it strikes me that you needn't trouble yourself about not being able to show me the hundredth man. I am not sure about it, but I expect I can put my finger upon him before very long."

"Now look here, Mr. Stratford," said Enoch, a little anxiously; "if you do find him, I hope it won't be on account of anythin' I've said. I've promised to keep him shady, and I'm not a man to go back on my word."

"Be perfectly easy on that point," said Mr. Stratford. "I'm not thinking of the owner of Vatoldi's, and I have no desire to seek him out."

"You wouldn't be likely to find him, if you tried," said Enoch, rising to depart; "and I can't help you. And as it's my opinion there ain't no other one like him, I advise you to give up the search for your hundredth man."

## CHAPTER XIII

SHORTLY after Mr. Stratford's arrival in the city he was called upon by his friend Arthur Thorne, who had a grievance.

"Do you know," said Thorne, "that you got me into a pretty scrape up there at Cherry Bridge?"

"How so?" asked Stratford.

"By not telling me that Miss Armatt was engaged. When you told me that you were not her lover, I made up my mind that as I am her lover, I would win her if I could. I never supposed that any one else was in the way. I wrote to Mrs. Justin asking permission to go there and push my suit, and I've had a letter from her telling me that for more than a year the young lady has been engaged to be married. Now, what a position is this for me to place myself in? Why didn't you tell me that she was engaged?"

"Because I do not approve of the engagement," said Stratford, "and think it well to say as little of it as possible."

Mr. Thorne gazed at his friend in amazement. "What in the name of common sense," he asked, "have you to do with it? And what matters it

whether you approve of it or not? She is not related to you?"

"Not in any way" said Stratford. "But I wish to be a good friend to her, and, at least, intend to try to be. And now let me tell you how things stand." Thereupon Stratford proceeded to speak of Gay Armatt. He told his friend what sort of girl she was, what her career had been, what her aspirations were, and what her future ought to be. He told how she had been engaged, while yet a student, and a very girl in all social matters, to a man whose marriage with her would degrade her, put an end to her mental development, and make only a hard-worked housekeeper of one who now had everything to hope for that was open to a woman. He proceeded to say that he believed that the girl should be saved from such a fate; and that, as there was no one else to do it, he intended to save her himself, if possible. And then he detailed his plans regarding Miss Armatt.

"By which you mean," cried Arthur, when he had finished, "that you intend to break off this engagement, and then marry her yourself."

Stratford shook his head. "I shall do nothing of the kind. If the engagement comes to an end, as I hope it may, I shall greatly desire that Miss Armatt shall marry some man worthy of her; and all that I shall do will be to endeavor to carry her over the gap between the present engagement and one which shall be suitable."

"Monstrous!" cried Arthur. "You might as well try to break up a marriage because you think the man

and his wife are not suited to each other; and I am surprised to hear you speak as you have done about a wife's position as mistress of her house. There is no nobler place for a woman. I have no doubt Miss Armatt looks forward with most joyous anticipations to those household duties and pleasures which you have decided that she ought not to have."

"You do not grasp the situation," said Stratford. "I know exactly what Miss Armatt looks forward to. She expects to be mistress of a household, and to be happy in that position. Her hopes in this direction are vague and ill-defined, while her views in regard to her future intellectual life are as clear and definite as those of any brain-worker who ever lived. But she does not know, as I do, that her marriage with Crisman will totally wreck this intellectual life, and make her a disappointed and unhappy woman."

Thorne arose suddenly, and began to walk up and down the room. "It angers me," he said, "to hear you talk in this way. How on earth do you know what her life will be? Is she not a rational being, able to plan out such things for herself?"

"She is not as able to do it as I am," said Stratford; "for she does not know Crisman as I know him."

For answer Mr. Thorne snapped his fingers, and then laughed derisively. "I speak mildly," he said, "when I call this a most unusual way of getting a wife. It is courtship after the eagle and fish-hawk fashion."

"I tell you," said Stratford, turning sharply upon him, "that I have no intention of making love to or of marrying Miss Armatt."

"Do you mean to say," asked Thorne, stopping in his restless walk, "that if you succeed in convincing this girl that there are much better men in the world than the man she is engaged to, and a much better kind of love than the love which exists between him and her, and that there is for her a happiness which is far greater than anything she could expect if she married Crisman, and in this way break off the match—do you mean to say, I ask, that you would then be willing for another man to step in, myself, for instance, and try to win her?"

"Entirely willing," said Stratford. "Nothing would please me better than to see her married to you."

Thorne burst out into a loud, contemptuous laugh, and taking up his hat, he walked away without a word. Never since he had been a man had he been guilty of such a breach of good manners.

Stratford was left with his temper somewhat aroused, but it soon cooled down. He was discovering that he could not expect sympathy in the task he had undertaken.

Arthur Thorne did not so soon cool down. It was not very easy to warm him up; but when he became heated, the reduction of his mental temperature was generally a slow process. He was angry with Stratford. He had persuaded himself, since the receipt of the letter from Mrs. Justin, that, as an honorable man, he had given up, absolutely and utterly, all amatory ideas in regard to Miss Armatt. She belonged to another person, and he had no right even to think of her in that sort of way. It was very hard for him to do this, for the girl had made an impres-

sion on him such as he had never received before. He believed that it was his duty to marry, and he wanted to marry; and when he was living in the house with Miss Armatt, and his friend Stratford had told him that he had no matrimonial intentions toward her, it had come to him much more forcibly than things usually came to him, that here was the woman out of all the world whom he would like to make his wife. But he believed he had been torn from every thought of this kind, and had gone to Stratford merely with the intention of mildly upbraiding him for having allowed him to put himself in a false position.

But now, as has been said, he was very angry with his friend, and the more he thought of it, the more he thought he perceived a very strong element of jealousy in this anger. But why should he have feelings of jealousy in regard to Miss Armatt? He had no right to such feelings, and could have none. It was a vile and wretched state of affairs, and Stratford had led him into it. Therefore was he angry.

It was on a Tuesday morning, and several days after Mr. Stratford had concluded the business which brought him to town, that Miss Gay Armatt sat on the porch of the Cherry Bridge house writing a letter. The paper lay upon a portfolio on her lap, and on the floor by her side stood her little traveling inkstand with its two tops open at angles which invited upset on the slightest provocation. She was writing very slowly, stopping often to think what she should say. She wished to be very careful to make this letter exactly what it ought to be, for it was to go to Mr.

Stratford, and it was the first one she had ever written to him. Her work, although slow, did not seem to be irksome to her; on the contrary, she appeared very much interested in it. Whenever she held her pen motionless, raised a little above the paper, and gazed up into the trees or the vines about her, there came into her eyes a brightness, and on her cheeks a faint deepening of their warmer tones, which made those eyes and cheeks more charming than in ordinary times, while her lips moved as though she might smile or speak or even hum a tune before she began to write again. On the tulip poplar near by, there sat a little bird which looked very like the bird to which, not long ago, she had told the secret of her birthday. If it had been truly the same bird, it would have been easy to imagine that his little breast was filled with wonder that that young creature sitting down there, in the shade, and in the fragrance of the honeysuckle vines, writing a letter on her knee, could be really twenty-one years old, and a very woman.

If the little bird could have looked into her brain, he would have seen that it was stored with the result of years of study and conscientious intellectual work; and if he could have looked into her heart, he would have seen that it was filled with impulses and emotions which were truly womanly. But could he have known her cheerful, half-blown notions about men, women, and the world, and could he have understood that joyousness of disposition which sprang from lovers' words, or woodbine scents, or clusters of wild strawberries, he might have said to himself that many

a wiser bird than he would think that this young creature, writing a letter in the shade of the vines, was mistaken in supposing that she was no longer a girl.

Gay had heard only the evening before that Mr. Stratford had returned to the Cherry Bridge neighborhood; and as she had something to say to him, she thought it her duty to write without loss of time: and that it was a duty she did not in the least shrink from might easily have been perceived by any human being or bird capable of making deductions of this kind. Mr. Crisman had been with her on the previous Sunday; and she had noticed, or had thought she noticed, that he was a little, a very little, wearied by what he called the monotony of the country. Now she was very desirous that he should not become wearied by Cherry Bridge. This was a region which could never be monotonous to her, but she could easily see that it might be so to Charley. He spent no whole day there except Sunday, and there was so little a person of his tastes could do in this part of the country on Sunday. He was fond of fishing, but he arrived too late on Saturday afternoons for any diversion of that sort; and, besides, he had told her that he did not like to go wandering about by himself with a fishing rod. If there were pleasant fellows along, that was another thing, but solitary fishing was too lonesome a business for him. He might sometimes stay over Monday for a day's fishing; but as there was no one to go with him, there was no use talking about it. Gay offered to go with him herself; but he laughed at her in a very good-humored and su-

perior way, and told her that if he ever found a stream where the fish were too plentiful and needed to be frightened and made gamesome, he would take her. She assured him that Mr. Stratford told her that she could, in time, learn to fish very well; but at this Crisman laughed again, and said that Stratford probably did not know women as well as he did. When it came to a real day's fishing, he thought that Mistress Gay would be much better pleased in a hammock on the lawn, with a novel and a box of caramels.

Gay did not dispute this point, for she knew that Charley was not fond of having his propositions controverted, and she herself took no pleasure in arguments; but she said she did not doubt that Mr. Stratford would go fishing with him, and he could have no better companion, for that gentleman knew the country so well he could take him where the best fishing was to be found. This proposal suited Mr. Crisman very well. If Stratford would go with him, he would make his arrangements to stay up some Monday, and have a long day's tramp among the trout streams. Gay said she would ask Mr. Stratford about it as soon as he came back; and when she heard of his return, she did not wait until he should call on them, but set herself to work to write him a letter.

The letter, when finished, was a very good one, and explained the situation in a satisfactory manner. Gay gave it to Mrs. Justin to read, who was surprised when told it had been written, but who, on reading it, could find nothing in it to which reasonable objection

could be made. On general principles she objected to Gay's writing to Mr. Stratford on any subject, or in any manner whatever. But as this was really Mr. Crisman's affair, and as he had desired that Gay should write the letter, Mrs. Justin of course had no right to interfere. She read the neatly written pages a second time, but she could discover nothing in them which would lead the recipient to suppose that the writer thought of aught else but that her lover should have a pleasant day's fishing, with an agreeable companion and competent guide.

Gay was anxious that her epistle should be dispatched as soon as possible, because, if Mr. Stratford would go fishing on the following Monday, she wanted to write immediately and let Mr. Crisman know. Mrs. Justin said she was going to send a man to the village, and that he could ride on and take the letter to Mr. Stratford. Gay went back to the porch to put it into an envelope and address it, and when she was pressing it down on her portfolio while sealing it, a thought came into her head. Taking up her pen, she wrote on the back of the envelope: "Are you *ever* coming to see us again?" When the man came she gave him the note, and he rode away.

At luncheon time the returning messenger brought back an answer. Mr. Stratford wrote that he would be much pleased to accompany Mr. Crisman on a fishing excursion on the day proposed, and he felt under obligations to Miss Armatt for giving him this opportunity of serving her friend. It was a very pleasant note, and a very polite one; but when Gay had read it through, there was a shade of disappointment on her face.

"He doesn't say a word," she exclaimed, "about coming to see us!"

Mrs. Justin was a little surprised that Gay should expect any such word, and she remarked that probably Mr. Stratford did not think it necessary to announce any intention of that kind.

The fishing expedition came off the following Monday; and in order to stay out of town for that day, Mr. Crisman came to Cherry Bridge on Sunday, instead of Saturday, as was his custom. This made his visit to Gay a comparatively short one; but as she was easily brought to see that putting on time to one end of his visit made it necessary to take off some from the other, she did not complain.

Mr. Stratford's motives in agreeing to the proposal for a day's fishing were of varied kinds. He had no particular desire to gratify the piscatorial propensities of Mr. Crisman, but he was more than willing to do anything which should be asked of him by Miss Armatt. But his principal object in consenting to be Mr. Crisman's companion for a whole day was to give that young man an opportunity of changing the opinion which he had formed of him. "It may be," Stratford had said to himself, "that I am mistaken in my estimate of the man. There may be qualities in him which will counterbalance those to which I so greatly object. At present he is very commonplace and vulgar; but his nature may be weaker than I take it to be, and he may be susceptible to the impressions which Gay would make upon almost any one, and thereby be drawn under her influence. If there is a possibility of anything of that kind, the

marriage may be well enough. There is no reason to suppose that she could elevate him very much, but she might raise him high enough to enter with some sort of sympathy into her pursuits and purposes. He must always be a drag upon her, but he might not be able to pull her down. And, again, he may have points which are so good in themselves as to overbalance some of the bad ones I have noticed in him. If that be the case, I will let Mrs. Justin and Thorne have their way. If there is anything good in the man, it is bound to come out in the course of a day's tramp."

Stratford was perfectly honest in his intentions towards his companion. He did not like Crisman, and would have been sorry, under any circumstances, to see him married to Gay, whose nature was of an entirely different order from that of her lover. But if there was any reason to believe that the marriage would not prove the wreck and ruin of which he thought so much and spoke so frequently, then he would consider it his duty not to interfere with the course events were taking. He did not intend during this day with Crisman to be a spy upon him; in fact, he made up his mind to avoid saying or doing anything which would be calculated to bring into view the bad points of the young man; he had seen enough of them, and desired to know no more concerning them. What he would make it his business to discover was the good that might be in Crisman.

The day was an admirable one for trout fishing. The sky was slightly overspread by clouds; there was breeze enough, and none too much; and if Crisman

had been a fellow inclined to grumble, which he was not, he would have found no reason for discontent this day. He had not known before what an agreeable and talkative companion Stratford could be, and what a generous fellow too, as was shown by his constantly surrendering favorable fishing opportunities to the younger man. There was another thing which Crisman very much liked in Stratford: he obtruded no advice. Crisman had not had very much practice with the rod and fly, and his only mental objection, when Gay proposed this expedition, was founded on the fear that Stratford, whom he knew to be a skillful angler, would be continually telling him what he ought to do. Stratford had too much good feeling, as well as tact, for this. He knew that the young man had come out for a day's fishing, and not a day's teaching; and he felt quite sure, too, that Crisman was not the man to submit to the presumption that teaching was necessary. So they got on capitally together, each fishing in his own way, and Crisman catching a good many trout, and rejoicing a great deal in his fortune.

About the middle of the day they sat down in the shade of a great pine-tree to rest and eat the luncheon they had brought with them. When Crisman had satisfied his appetite, which was a very fine one, he lighted a cigar and stretched himself upon the ground, covered thickly with sweet-scented pine needles, to have a smoke and enjoy the situation. Stratford sat near by, looking upon the young man with an expression in which there was an odd mixture of kindly feeling and antipathy. He had found in Crisman

much of that buoyant good nature which was so noticeable in Gay, and it seemed difficult to believe that under any circumstances he would be aught but a cheery and heartening companion; and this disposition should count against a great many shortcomings in a matrimonial partner. But at the same time there was an air of self-assertion about Crisman which was unpleasant to the other. There was no occasion for his asserting himself against anything, or in favor of anything; and this assertion seemed to be a habit consequent upon a belief in a man's right to demand from others a recognition of his merits. His theories, his creeds, and his prejudices were placed, so to speak, in his shop window, and he stood at his door calling upon the passers-by to look upon them.

"There's something very jolly and independent in all this," said Crisman, as he unlaced and kicked off one of his heavy boots. "There are no bonds of slavery here; no goods to sell, no books to keep, no customers, no firm, no women."

"Do you number women among your bonds of slavery?" asked Stratford.

"That depends," answered Crisman. "There are moments when a woman is a good deal of a clog. For instance, if we had brought the ladies with us, I could not have made myself comfortable by kicking off that boot."

"Very true," said Stratford.

"I don't want you to think," continued Crisman, after a puff of tobacco smoke had leisurely curled itself up from his mouth, as he lay stretched upon his

back, his head resting on his coat, which he had rolled up for a pillow, "that I have anything to say against women. I am the last man in the world to do that. I suppose you know I am going to marry, and one of the finest human beings to be found on this planet will be my wife. If you knew Miss Gay Armatt as I know her, you'd agree to that."

"I agree perfectly," said Stratford.

"I truly believe," continued Crisman, "that there isn't a girl like her. I am not fool enough to say she is absolutely perfect,—an angel all but the wings,—but I will say this: that, with the exception of the way she has been over-educated,—and that, in my opinion, was the fault of other people more than her own,—she can't be improved upon."

"Over-educated?" remarked Stratford.

"Yes, sir," said Crisman; "that's exactly the word. She spent four solid years in learning things which will be of no more use to her than another pair of legs would be to that bird which you see flying up there. When she entered her college she was seventeen years old, and as well educated as any girl on earth need want to be; and yet she has wasted four years of her life in slaving at mathematics, Latin, and Greek, and I don't know what else besides, which are of no use whatever to a woman who expects to be a wife and a mother and the head of a family. I don't say this to Gay, because it is done now and can't be helped, and there's no use raking up trouble about it. And I don't say it to Mrs. Justin, because she had a very large finger in the pie, having pushed Gay on in this college business more than anybody else. But I

say it to you, because you are a man, and can understand how I feel about it. I speak warmly on this matter, because I know lots of other girls who are going on in the same way Gay has gone, and I think it's a shame that they are allowed to waste a good part of their lives in stuffing their minds with what to them is no more than dead leaves and ashes. Now, look at Gay Armatt. You wouldn't believe it, but she's twenty-one years old, and she might as well have been married three years ago. In that case she wouldn't have married me, because I didn't know her then; but that doesn't alter the principle of the thing. Now, allow one year for courting, just look at the four years of absolute happiness that have been taken out of her life by this absurdity of sending her to college. If it had been really necessary for her to earn her living as a teacher, that would have been another thing; but her friends ought to have known that for a girl like her there would be no necessity for anything of that kind. And that's the case with nine-tenths of the girls who go to college. They don't intend to be teachers; and as soon as they get themselves graduated they begin to be interested in the things which really concern them, and forget all they have been taught at college in a confounded sight less time than it took them to learn it. The education that sticks to them is what they got before they went to college. Now, I want you to understand I'm not saying anything against Gay Armatt. She has lost a lot of time, but that can't be helped; and what she has learned isn't going to hurt her. She talks a great deal about keeping up her

studies after we are married, and making herself mistress of this and that thing which I don't understand, and which, to tell the truth, I never tried to. I don't say a word against all this, but just leave it to her own good sense to find out that when she has got her hands full of what makes up a woman's real work in this world, she will have to give these other things the go-by."

"But suppose she does not see that for herself?" asked Stratford.

"My dear sir," said Crisman, sitting up and throwing away his cigar, "I am one of the most indulgent men in the world, and an easier-going temper than mine you won't meet with often; but if I had a wife who didn't see that her true duty in life had nothing to do with the higher mathematics and Greek verbs, I'd make it my business that she did see it. There won't be anything of this kind necessary with Gay, because she's not the sort of girl to want to make my life miserable by poking among rubbish of that sort. When she knows I don't like it, she'll stop it."

At that moment a drinking-cup of glass which Stratford had been holding in his hand came heavily to the ground.

"Anything broken?" asked Crisman, with a quick turn of his head.

"Yes," said Stratford, rising; "I think there is."

Crisman looked at the fragments of the cup, and laughingly remarking that that was a case past mending, put on his coat, and took up his rod and basket.

## CHAPTER XIV

HEN Mr. Crisman, towards the end of the afternoon, returned from his fishing excursion, he was seen afar by Miss Gay, who ran to meet him. As she came up to him she first inquired why Mr. Stratford had not come back with him, and then asked if he had had a good day's sport. She might have asked the second question first had it not been, in fact, only a matter of form; for she saw in her lover's face and demeanor that he had been enjoying himself.

"Success!" he exclaimed. "I should say so!" And he lifted the lid of his basket. "Look at that! I should have caught a lot more, for they were rising just as well as ever, but Stratford said we had all that the two families could possibly eat, and he didn't see the use of catching any more. That is not my way, for when I go fishing, I go to catch all I can get and make a big count; but, of course, as I was using his tackle and things, I didn't press the matter, and we stopped an hour or two sooner than there was any need to. I did suggest that he should come back with me, but he didn't seem to take to the idea."

Gay thought that when people had caught all the fish for which they had any use, it was a very sensible

and humane thing to stop fishing. And she thought, moreover, that Mr. Stratford appeared to have good ideas on a great many different subjects; but she did not speak her thoughts. She had no doubt that, as Charley grew older, he would discover for himself a great many of the things which Mr. Stratford had discovered for himself.

At dinner that evening the apparent disinclination of Mr. Stratford to visit at Cherry Bridge was mentioned both by Gay and Crisman; and although Mrs. Justin passed the matter over without comment, her mind was a good deal disturbed. It was an abnormal and exceedingly unpleasant state of affairs when her old friend Stratford lived at the Bullripple farm and did not come to Cherry Bridge. Not only did Mrs. Justin regret it because it deprived her of the company of her friend, but she feared very much that Stratford's absence might be noticed, and that the people in the neighborhood might connect it in some way with Gay's presence at Cherry Bridge. Gossip of this sort would be painful and even abhorrent to Mrs. Justin, and she determined to put an end to what she considered a very unnatural condition of things.

After Mr. Crisman's departure the next morning, she drove herself over to the Bullripple farm, where she was fortunate enough to find Mr. Stratford mending some fishing-tackle under the shade of a great oak in the front yard.

"I have come to have a very plain talk with you," she said.

"I am glad of it," said Stratford; "and here is the easiest outdoor chair the place affords."

"It may not be a very long conversation," she said, "for I hope you will readily agree with me that it is absolutely wrong, from whatever point it may be looked at, for an old friend, such as you are, to live so near my house without visiting it. Of course I know the reason; but I don't think there ought to be any such reason. I trust you have come to the conclusion that you are altogether mistaken in your ideas about the engagement of Mr. Crisman and Gay, and that you no longer think it your duty to interfere in the matter. That being the case, I am most anxious to tell you how earnestly I desire that you should visit my house as you used to, and be the same good friend to all of us that you once were."

Mrs. Justin leaned forward as she spoke, and there was a touch of moisture in her beautiful eyes.

Stratford looked at her steadily for a moment before he spoke. "Mrs. Justin," he said, "you cannot imagine what pain it gives me to hear you speak in that way, and to answer you as I must."

"It often seems to me," said Mrs. Justin, drawing herself a little back, "that when persons do things that not only give themselves pain but greatly grieve their friends, it should be self-evident that the way to make everybody happy is to stop doing those things."

Stratford smiled. "That quick way out of trouble will not answer in this case. I have the greatest possible desire to visit your house, but I must also state that since our last conversation your views and mine concerning Miss Armatt's engagement have become more widely different than they were before. I now

believe that it would be an actual crime to allow that man to marry her."

"And you still persist," said Mrs. Justin, "in your intention of endeavoring to win her away from him."

"If the end can be accomplished in no other way, I most certainly do," said Stratford.

"Then, of course," said Mrs. Justin, her face paling a little as she spoke, "it will not do for you to visit Cherry Bridge while Gay is there."

She made a motion as if she were about to rise, but Stratford quickly said: "Do not go. There is much more I wish to say to you."

She kept her seat, and, leaning back in her chair, she sighed. "Oh," she said, "if you would only tell me that you had determined to let these two be happy in their own way, how thankful I should be!"

"I have been thinking over this matter a very great deal," said Stratford, "and if you will be willing to join with me in what I wish to do, I will make an entire change in my plan."

"Join you!" exclaimed Mrs. Justin.

"That is exactly what I mean," he continued. "I want you to help me save this girl—your friend, whose promise and worth you know so thoroughly—from an absolutely unfit marriage."

"Mr. Stratford," said she, "you know very well that I would sooner cut off my hand than to try to make a girl and a young man break the solemn promises that they have made to each other, especially when I know that they love each other with all their hearts."

"I have believed," said Stratford, "and still be-

lieve, that the very best way of making Gay Armatt understand the wrong position she has taken in engaging herself to Crisman is to give her an opportunity of becoming acquainted with other men; and I do not think I have flattered myself very much when I drew her attention to myself as a better man than Crisman. I do not hesitate to say to you that I believe that, had I the opportunity, I could make her understand what a companionship for life ought to be, and that she could never expect such a companionship in Crisman."

"It is perfectly horrible to hear you talk that way," said Mrs. Justin.

"But I do not intend to insist," said Stratford, "that this plan of mine is the only one by which Gay Armatt can be saved from the fate which threatens her; and if you will undertake to make her perceive that it is a duty she owes to herself not to marry Crisman, I will give up the scheme which is so objectionable to you, and will retire absolutely from the affair."

"Why do you talk to me in that way?" said Mrs. Justin. "You know perfectly well that I would never consent to do anything of the kind."

"I thought it right to give you the opportunity," said Stratford. "I knew you could exert a powerful influence on your young friend; but, in spite of that, I should have very great fears for your success. The arguments of parents and friends against the suitability of lovers are generally but words wasted. In such cases it is better to divert the stream than to try to dam it. But, as I said before, notwithstanding

my preference for my own plan, I am perfectly willing if you will undertake this work—"

"Which I will not," interrupted Mrs. Justin.

—"to put it into your hands. But, as you decline to take it, I feel it my duty to go on with it, if I shall have the opportunity."

"Mr. Stratford," said his companion, leaning forward towards him again, "do you know anything terrible about Mr. Crisman, which makes you so relentless towards him? Has he committed a crime, or what is the matter with him, that you stand up so obstinately and declare that he shall not marry the woman of his choice? It cannot only be that he is of a lower intellectual grade than she. There must be something more than that which makes you wish to interfere between persons with whom you have no connection whatever."

"If you will look upon the matter with unbiased judgment," said Stratford, "I think you must see that Crisman, for his own benefit and advantage, purposes to commit a crime." And then, more minutely and forcibly than he had ever spoken of it before, he told Mrs. Justin what he had found Crisman to be, and deduced from that the disastrous result to Gay of her marriage with him.

Mrs. People sat at one of the open windows of the farm-house, shelling peas and looking across the yard at the two who were talking under the great oak-tree. It was very easy to see that their business was important, and she hoped, from the bottom of her heart, that Mr. Stratford was making up his mind to buy a certain outlying portion of Mrs. Justin's estate.

Often and often had Mrs. People urged that purchase upon him, and she did trust that now her words were beginning to come to something. To be sure, she would be very sorry not to have him live with them every summer, but all that might stop at any time; and he would make a most excellent summer neighbor, both to herself and brother, and to Mrs. Justin. And, more than that, the fact that a city man came to Cherry Bridge and bought property and built, would help the sale of land in the neighborhood, and might put money into Enoch's pocket, and, ultimately, into that of her son John. Therefore she did most truly trust that Mr. Stratford was telling Mrs. Justin just exactly what he was willing to give, and that she would agree to it.

Stratford talked earnestly and steadily and a long time; and when he had finished, Mrs. Justin arose from her chair.

"You have convinced me but of one thing," she said, "and that is, you truly believe your motive is a good one. What you say of Mr. Crisman may be true now, but he is still young, and I cannot believe that it will always be true; and, in any case, there is the fact before us that the two have promised to marry each other."

She moved towards her pony carriage, he walking by her side. "I see that I can make no impression on you," she said; "but still I do not intend to give up my object of restoring the old condition of friendly intercourse between us. I cannot say now what I shall do, but the thing must be done. If necessary, Gay's visit to me shall be brought to a close."

"I beg of you," said Stratford, earnestly, "not to think of anything of that sort. I will go away myself."

"How will that help to restore our friendship, and give me an opportunity of discussing with you all those points I have set down in my memorandum-book? No, you must stay here; and in a day or two I will let you know what I have determined upon. I will do nothing without first advising you of it."

And she stepped into her phaeton, and took the reins which Stratford handed to her.

When Mr. Stratford returned from a long drive at the close of the next day, he was handed a note from Mrs. Justin, which had arrived for him in the morning. It read as follows:

"DEAR MR. STRATFORD: From the moment you read this I wish you to understand that you are to come to see us as often and stay as long as your important engagements with trout and mountain views will permit. Do not imagine from this that I have exiled my dear Gay. Her presence here need not have the slightest effect on your coming, and your coming will not have the slightest effect upon her. This may appear a little cruel, but I must admit that I take a certain wicked pleasure in writing it. As I do not wish to mystify you any longer, I will immediately state that I have had a long conversation with Gay, and I find that you and I might have saved ourselves the trouble of discussing the subject of her engagement. She is perfectly devoted to Mr. C——, and I am positive that there is no person living who could divert her affections from him. I always knew she loved him most sincerely, but I never imagined the strength and depth of her affection until I had that talk with her last evening. And, more than that, if you could hear, which you shall not, the plans which this dear girl, now opening her soul for the first time in fullest confidence to a friend, has

made for work with him and for him, you would long for the power to deny to yourself that you had ever thought of interfering with their happiness. One of the strongest points in favor of her complete success in carrying out her plans is that she knows his shortcomings, and, in my opinion, has most admirable ideas with regard to the way in which they ought to be treated. She will be a guardian angel to him, and I firmly believe that, in one year after their marriage, Mr. Crisman will be an entirely different person from the young man whom we now know. So you see, my dear philanthropist, that your schemes for this young lady's benefit can come to nothing; that is, they cannot produce the result which you desire. Their only effect will be that her studies will be assisted, her knowledge of the world will be increased, and her mind will receive that polish from contact with the mind of a thoroughly well-educated and cultured man, which I desired when I planned for the frequent companionship of yourself and Gay.

"Yours, in a most delighted state of mind,

"LILIAN JUSTIN.

"P. S. Of course, in my conversation with Gay, I never alluded to you in any way.

"In reading over this letter, I cannot help feeling a little sorry for you. I know I ought not to have such a feeling, but I have it — just a little."

## CHAPTER XV

T was deeply exasperating to the soul of J. Weatherby Stull to find that his tact and cunning had been overmatched, and his important secret discovered by that wily-souled old farmer, Enoch Bullripple. To many men this defeat would have been humiliating, but Mr. Stull could not be humiliated; he was simply enraged and filled with a desire for vengeance.

The advantage which Mr. Bullripple had gained over him with regard to the future prospects of John People troubled Mr. Stull not at all. In fact he was glad to make John a partner with a very small interest in the Vatoldi concern, and probably would have done so some day of his own accord. This position secured John's secrecy concerning the identity of the principal owner, for the young man had been made to understand thoroughly that in case of bad faith on his part the business would be brought to a sudden close. Regarding the old man's possession of the secret Mr. Stull felt perfectly safe. Enoch Bullripple had promised him before the agreement with John had been concluded that he would never divulge the fact that Mr. Stull owned Vatoldi's; and when Enoch Bullripple had given his word, Mr. Stull

knew that it would be kept. In fact the secret was much safer when Enoch knew it and promised to keep it than when unknown to him and the subject of his prying curiosity.

But his satisfaction in regard to this phase of the affair made no difference in Stull's feelings towards the old scoundrel who, with unparalleled effrontery, had laid his sacrilegious hands upon that thing of inestimable worth, the product of years of thought and experience, the Vatoldi system. In his vandalic operations Enoch had shown such fiendish ingenuity that Mr. Stull felt sure he must for some time have suspected the identity of the man against whose peace of mind his machinations were directed, and that he was thus endeavoring, in some degree, to take a spiteful vengeance on Mr. Stull for that gentleman's acquisition, perfectly legal and proper, of his sister's farm.

That Enoch Bullripple should suffer for his malicious wrong-doing, Mr. Stull was fully determined, and he believed he had tact enough to ruin the old farmer, and yet give him no reason to believe that he had anything to do with it.

With all this arranged and ordered in his very orderly mind, Mr. Stull found himself once more in buoyant and cheerful spirits. He had work before him, and he was glad to do it. With regard to Vatoldi's his action would be prompt and vigorous. The place had been desecrated, and the most radical measures would be necessary to place it again upon its former footing. The boycotters, who had been much disheartened by the changes that had taken

place under the Bullripple administration, were encouraged to fresh efforts by the return of John People to his post. They imagined that his absence had been a ruse to make them suppose that the business had passed into other hands, and they determined to show Mr. People that they were not to be deterred by such tricks as that.

But little Mr. Stull cared now for the boycotters. With his faithful manager again at his command, and with Vatoldi's, such as it used to be, absolutely gone and vanished, so that no thought of interference with its orderly system and its prosperity need prevent his making any change he might choose, he decided upon a bold step. He would close up the place, renovate, beautify, and enlarge it, and reopen it as the old Vatoldi's invigorated with fresh youth. All the circumstances of the case were in his favor. It was the season when the patrons he most cared for were out of town. A large adjoining store on which he had for years cast longing eyes was now at his disposal, and, above all, there was no better way to cleanse the establishment from its recent contaminations than to blot it out of existence for a time, and then recreate it in its old form.

Accordingly the firemen-waiters were discharged, the business was closed up, and when some boycotters arrived with a quantity of new circulars printed on bright red paper, they found the shutters up and the door locked, and a notice posted, which stated that in consequence of extensive alterations and enlargements the establishment would be closed for some weeks. This put an end to the boycotting business.

The body of former waiters, who for some time had been regretting that they had not been willing to stick to their aprons and jackets, had been lately assured by their leader that John People's running away and coming back was a sign of weakness, and that a fresh attack upon him would surely be successful. They now lost all hope. Their strike had brought a great deal of privation upon them. Even supposing their action had been the real cause of the closing of the establishment, it had not been of the least benefit to themselves. Having now nothing to fight against, they determined to go to work as soon as they could; but, before doing so, they took the man who had led them into all their troubles into a lonely back yard, and after giving him a most unanimous beating, they emptied upon him two barrels of ashes, and would have provided him with sackcloth if they had supposed it would add to the gloominess of his reflections.

Through John People, Mr. Stull now arranged with contractors for his intended improvements; and when all the plans had been made, and everything prepared for the beginning of the work, Mr. Stull thought it a suitable time to give John the holiday for which his uncle had stipulated. During the preliminary demolitions of partitions, and tearing up of floors, and carting away of rubbish, the contractors would need no supervision. But when the new work was actually begun, Mr. Stull would wish his managing partner to be on hand to make daily reports and receive daily instructions.

The usually serene John had been very angry during his brief sojourn in the South, and when he returned he had not hesitated to tell his uncle what he thought of the trick which had been played upon him. But old Enoch had received his nephew's reproaches with such imperturbability, and had taken such immediate and decided steps for the furtherance of the young man's business prosperity, that the latter could not but forgive him. With nothing, therefore, to cast a cloud upon the radiant skies of his holiday, John repaired to the scenes of his boyhood.

Mr. Stull's family usually went into the country as early in the season as any other fashionable people, but this year the domestic economies had been very much interfered with by the Vatoldi disturbances, and the family was still in town. For reasons of his own Mr. Stull determined not to go to a watering-place, but to the farm which he owned in the pleasant region of Cherry Bridge. His wife and daughters were ready to leave town much sooner than he himself desired to go, and they were therefore dispatched, in company with their voluminous baggage, to take possession of the apartments that had been prepared for the family in the house of the tenant of the farm, with whom they were to board.

It might have appeared to an ordinary observer, cognizant of Mr. Stull's designs against the financial prosperity of Enoch Bullripple, that it was a rash and imprudent step for Stull, if he wished to remain unknown as the author of the intended injuries to the old farmer, to come into the neighborhood at the time

when the injuries were about to be inflicted. But Mr. Stull had his wits about him. He had resolved that under no circumstances would he show in this affair, and when his working operations had been finally decided upon, he found that his occasional presence at Cherry Bridge would be a great aid in the preservation of his secret. This, therefore, was the principal reason for selecting this long-unvisited farm as a suitable place for his summer sojourn.

Mrs. Stull, whose tastes were rather domestic than otherwise, was very willing, after a winter of a somewhat goaded social activity, to retire into an uneventful country life; the two younger girls, both in short dresses, were delighted at the prospect of field rambles and mountain scrambles; and even Miss Matilda thought she might find a good deal to amuse and interest her independent and practical mind at Cherry Bridge.

During the first week of their stay on the farm Mr. Stull's family found their anticipations of pleasure fully realized; but towards the end of that period Miss Matilda was obliged to admit to herself that things were getting a little dull. She had taken all the drives she cared to take with her mother and sisters; she had taken all the walks she cared to take by herself, for her mother never walked, and the two girls always ran; and she began to see that nature had not designed her to be happy under any circumstances in which she had nobody to talk to.

It was in this mood that she sauntered one day across a broad pasture-field through which a narrow path meanderingly ran. With one small and tightly

gloved hand she held a bright red parasol over her head, and with the other hand she raised the skirt of her fashionably modeled dress just enough to show her tightly fitting boots. To those who were acquainted with this small but very pretty young woman, everything about her seemed to partake of the characteristics of her gloves and boots. Even her ideas, although they were not very far-reaching, were admirably adapted and shaped to their objects.

Raising her eyes as she daintily trod the narrow path, she saw, approaching her, a young man of rotund and sturdy proportions, an upright carriage, and a strong, energetic, though rather rolling gait. His rounded cheeks were somewhat flushed, perhaps from exercise, and on his brow there was an air of gentle resignation, mingled now with some other feeling which might be embarrassment, uncertain anticipation, or some form of indeterminate anxiety. The moment the eyes of Miss Matilda fell upon this young man she recognized him by the resigned brow which she had frequently noticed while taking refreshments at Vatoldi's.

John had seen Miss Matilda long before she had noticed him. He was not altogether surprised at the vision of this being, who for many months had been so prominent in his thoughts; for he knew the family were coming to their farm, and it was very natural that Miss Matilda should give herself the pleasure of a walk abroad. His soul was rejoiced to look upon her again, but his ideas of propriety and exact social conduct were in a sad tremble. He did not know what he ought to do when he met her. Strictly speak-

ing he was not acquainted with her, although some slight conversation had once taken place between them at the cashier's desk at Vatoldi's. It might be that she would not resent a bow from him, should she but remember that she had spoken with him, notwithstanding a collateral recollection of having very often paid him for her luncheons. Moreover, the two were now in the country, upon a narrow path through a field, and under such circumstances it was certainly proper for a man to raise his hat when he passed a lady, no matter whether she recognized him or not. But more powerful than these motives impelling him to bow to Miss Matilda, was the remembrance that he was now her father's partner. To be sure she did not know this, but he was very conscious of it, and this consciousness had already begun to have a stiffening effect upon his character. Miss Matilda might not deign even to look at him, but a rebuff of this kind would not have the effect upon him it would have had a few weeks before. "Therefore," said John to himself, "I shall take off my hat as I pass her." And as this act, look upon it as he might, had in it a gentle flavor of acquaintanceship, it was quite natural his heart should flutter and his cheeks increase their healthful glow.

But, to the great surprise of the young man, Miss Stull stopped before he reached her, and stood, looking pleasantly at him as if she were awaiting his approach. This was indeed the case, for the heart of Miss Matilda was cheered by the sight of a young man whose appearance was familiar to her, and to whom she had a very fair excuse for speaking.

"Good-morning," she said, when he was near enough.

John, his whole being thoroughly moved by this salutation, stopped, took off his hat, put it on again, ejaculated "Good-morning," and without any volition on his part was about to pass on. But Miss Matilda had no intention of allowing this.

"Are you not the gentleman who attended to the desk at Vatoldi's restaurant?" she said. "I have seen you there so often that I recognized you immediately, although it appears very odd to meet you out here in this far-away country place."

John indistinctly murmured something to the effect that it was rather odd.

"But now I come to think of it," she continued, "you once told me you were born here. In that case of course it isn't odd that you should sometimes come here."

The fact that she remembered the little conversation gave John such a rush of delight to the head that he was incapable of making an immediate remark suitable to the occasion, and stammered out instead some words which seemed to indicate that he thought it was rather odd that he should have been born here.

"Everything must seem very familiar to you," said Miss Matilda, "and things ought to be very familiar to me too, for I used to live here when I was a girl. But, somehow or other, they are not. These fields are not so large as I remember them, and the mountains and woods seem a great deal nearer than they used to be. I wonder if this is the field where that old gen-

tleman who told me in the restaurant that he was your uncle used to keep a savage bull for the sole purpose, as I believed, of frightening children off the grass."

John's tumultuous emotion was now subsiding into an astonished delight at the friendly words and manner of Miss Stull. "Yes, ma'am," said he, "this is the field, but there is no bull here now."

"Oh, I am not in the slightest degree afraid of that," said Miss Matilda, "with some one here to drive him away."

John smiled and glowed, and, emboldened by his pleasure, made an independent remark. "You couldn't have been very much afraid of it, ma'am," he said, "when you came into the field with your red parasol."

"I did think of the bull," said Miss Matilda, twirling the parasol in front of her as she spoke, "and I thought if he should come at me it would be a very good thing to have this red parasol. I should have thrown it down in the way he was coming, and then, while he was horning it, I should have run away."

"That would have been a tip-top thing to do," said John, admiringly. "I don't believe anybody could have done better than that."

"Except keep out of the field altogether," she said. "And now can you tell me which way I ought to go to find a path which will lead me to some place where I can get into the road that runs by my father's farm. You know where that is?"

"Oh, yes," said John, "that is the place I was born on. If you just walk across the grass to the

fence-corner over there, you will come to bars which can be let down, and then on the other side of the next field is a gate which opens into the road."

"How do you let down bars?" asked Miss Matilda.

"Oh, I'll go over and do it for you," said John.

Miss Matilda smiled and thanked him, and the two walked together over the grass to the fence-corner.

"It seems strange," said Miss Stull, "that, being born on a farm, you did not stay there and become a farmer instead of going to the city and keeping a restaurant."

"I didn't have any choice in the matter," said John. And in his heart he thought that he was rejoiced that his mother's home had been snatched from her, and that he had been cast forth upon the world; for, otherwise, he would never have come in contact with the Stulls, and this enrapturing walk across the fields could never have been a reality.

"After all," continued the lady, "it isn't such a very bad arrangement, for I suppose your uncle can raise bulls here and send them down to be used in your restaurant."

John smiled vigorously. "Uncle does sometimes sell us things from the farm, but we never have any call for the kind of meat you speak of. All that we buy is the tenderest and best."

"That is very true," said Miss Matilda, "for I remember that I often used to get there the nicest kinds of lamb-chops, and, sometimes, sweet-breads."

Had the heavens opened? Was it possible that the memory of those carefully reserved chops and sweet-breads still lingered in her soul? Could it be that

they had made an impression thereon? Dared he to believe that she saw in these delicacies something more than the lamb or the calf could offer? Be the truth what it might, it was enough now to know that she remembered those choice bits which he had so carefully preserved for her in the corner of his ice-box, and which represented the feelings that filled, not a corner, but the whole of his heart.

"If ever again," he said to himself, as he strode proudly beside her, "she doesn't come for two or three days, and any of those cuts are left over, no soul on earth shall eat them but myself!"

The bars were taken down with great alacrity. Then John offered to accompany the lady to the gate, for, as he remarked, it was more than likely that it was fastened up in some way that would make it hard for her to open it. Miss Stull had no desire to lose John's company at that point, and, accepting his offer, the two continued their walk.

When they had passed through a gate, which really did require the hand of a man to open it, John said, pointing to a farm-house which stood some little distance back from the road: "That is the house of my uncle, Mr. Bullripple. My mother lives with him, and I am spending my holiday there. Wouldn't you like to step in and rest? My mother will be very glad to see you, and it is a good mile to your father's farm along this road."

Miss Matilda hesitated a moment. "Do you think your mother could give me a glass of milk?" she said.

"Milk!" exclaimed John, "gallons of it! Rich as cream, and right out of the cool spring-house."

"That sounds nice," said Miss Matilda, "although I don't want gallons. I think I shall stop and rest."

With more of a roll, and more of a swell, and more of a vigorous step than he had ever shown before, John crossed the road and threw open the Bullripple gate. Up the short lane shaded by cherry-trees he proudly escorted Miss Stull. The young lady declared she did not care to go into the house, but would rather rest in the shade outside, so John led her to a chair under the great oak-tree where stood the table at which Mr. Stratford frequently wrote his letters.

"I will tell mother you are here," said John, "and you shall have some milk in a moment."

When Mrs. People heard who was sitting under the tree, she knitted her brows. Her opinion of Mr. Stull was one of the strongest reprobation, and, years ago, had been personally stated to him. She had never changed this opinion, nor did she know of any reason why she should like anything belonging to him. If his daughter stopped in her yard and asked for a drink of milk, she would give it to her just as she would give it to a needy tramp, but she did not want to go out and see her. Besides, she was busy in the kitchen, and was not in a condition to see folks.

"Mother," said John, "I will go to the spring-house and get a pitcher of milk, and will you please put some of those big raspberries that were picked to-day into something, and I will take them out to her."

The chin of Mrs. People went up into the air, and she made no answer. She was not accustomed to refuse any request made by her dear boy, but this was going very far. Why should John put himself

to so much trouble to refresh old Stull's daughter? She stepped to a window of the kitchen which was in the end of the house and commanded a view of the oak-tree. That girl out there was certainly very pretty, and wore as stylish clothes as ever had been seen in this part of the country. Mrs. People did not affect such things herself, but she knew them when she saw them.

As she stood and gazed on Miss Matilda, a brilliant idea flashed into Mrs. People's mind. "Suppose," she thought, "just suppose that should happen!" and she rubbed together her floury hands. She knew that Miss Stull, as well as her father, frequently came to Vatoldi's, and she supposed it was there John had made the young lady's acquaintance, and nothing could be more natural than that they should like each other. She was truly a pretty little piece of goods; and as for John, a manlier figure and an honester face were never created for the delight of womankind. Yes, indeed, if that should come about, the family would get back more than they had lost; and if old Stull didn't like it, he could lump it. And to know that he lumped it would be a rare joy to Mrs. People.

Quickly now the good woman washed her hands. A handsome glass dish was heaped with bright red raspberries, several slices of her nicest cake were put upon a pretty china plate, a bowl of white sugar was brought out, and when John appeared with the milk she sent him back for a pitcher of cream. And while he was gone she glanced along her pantry shelves, and added some guava jelly to the other refreshments.

When John came, he covered a tray with a large napkin, and with much celerity arranged upon it the articles mentioned, together with the necessary spoons, saucers, napkin, and tumbler, and a glass of water. Throwing a small table-cloth over his left arm, John took up the tray and stepped briskly into the yard; his mother assuring him that she would go out and speak to the young lady as soon as she had put on something fit to be seen.

Arrived at the tree, the tray was daintily placed upon the grass, the cloth was swiftly but correctly spread upon the table, and then, with the skill of the head-man at Vatoldi's, John placed dishes, glasses, pitchers, and saucers upon the fine white cloth.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Miss Stull, when John appeared. "You've brought me a regular meal! But I must say this seems quite natural! Why, I could almost imagine myself at Vatoldi's, and you, or one of your waiters, fixing up everything in such a tempting way!"

And Miss Matilda, not at all loath to enjoy what was set before her, drew off her gloves and began her repast; while John poured out the milk, served the berries, handed the cream and sugar, proffered the cake, and performed every service with the grace and foresight of an accomplished knight of the restaurant.

Now appeared, at the front door of the house, Mr. Stratford, prepared for an afternoon drive. Somewhat surprised at the scene under the oak-tree, he stood and gazed at it with considerable interest. "Are the business instincts of that young man so strong,"

he thought, "that he has started a restaurant in the yard? He has, certainly, a very nice-looking customer."

It was plain to a man of observation that John's attentions to the lady who was refreshing herself were much more assiduous than those paid by the ordinary waiter; and Stratford smiled as he noticed the alacrity and readiness with which the young man anticipated and provided for the desires of the lady.

Having put on his gloves, Mr. Stratford walked across an opposite corner of the yard towards a hitching-post where his horse and buggy awaited him. Miss Stull now first noticed him, and immediately inquired of John who was that gentleman. John gave her the necessary information, and, while expressing her surprise that a gentleman like that should be willing to shut himself up here in a farmhouse, she watched Mr. Stratford as he prepared to drive away. She admired his straight and well-proportioned figure; she appreciated to the full the correct and handsome fashion of the clothes he wore; and although his face was somewhat embrowned, it met with her entire approval. Instantly she began to think that this neighborhood, which that morning had seemed to her so dull, might yet prove quite interesting.

Stratford drove away, and almost immediately afterwards Mrs. People appeared under the oak-tree, attired in a pink and white striped frock, very much washed and starched. She offered Miss Stull a very friendly greeting which that young lady received with suitable moderation. John placed a chair for his mother, and, the repast having been concluded,

he carried away the dishes, the table-cloth, and napkin.

"I'm very much obliged to you for your milk," said Miss Matilda, "and the berries were really delicious." She said nothing about the cake, which Mrs. People had made herself, and praise of which she anxiously awaited, but proceeded to ask Mrs. People if there were many persons from the cities now staying in this part of the country.

"No," said Mrs. People, generously refraining from any hints in regard to the quality of the cake. "There's Mr. Stratford, who, perhaps, you noticed just goin' away in his buggy. He's been spendin' the summers with us for a good many years, and no President of the United States ever came near him for bein' an out-and-out gentleman from his hat to his boots. He's goin' now to see Mrs. Justin, who lives about three miles from here, and she might, perhaps, be called city folks too, because she has a house in town, although this one is her real home, bein' where her husband died, and where she comes every year just as certain as the Spring lambs. Besides these, there's no city folks except a gentleman who comes every Saturday to Mrs. Justin's to see a young lady who is stayin' there, who is just about as pretty as any pictur' that ever was painted, though John has said to me two or three times, and when I first heard him speak of it I couldn't for the life of me think why he made such a p'int of her looks, that she's not the kind of a girl he fancies, there bein' somethin' too much of her, and an air about her which he calls 'too larky,' havin' seen her once or twice walkin' over the fields, and goin' along in a

way which I suppose reminded him of a lark bird; and says he to me: 'Mother,' and I declare I didn't understand what he meant when he first said it— 'Mother,' said he, 'the kind of a girl I fancy is more like a wren'; one of these Jenny wrens, ma'am, that build in a box. You don't see 'em in the city, perhaps, but there's plenty of 'em here. And John says he fancies a girl that's more like them, bein' littler than a lark, and more natty and smarter; an' I am sure no one would ever be offended if they could once see a wren settin' on the top of her box, just as neat as a new pin, and always there when wanted, at least I suppose so, though never havin' wanted a wren I can't say for certain, though I know very well that a lark is a different kind of a bird, and not to be depended on."

About larks and wrens Miss Stull cared nothing at all, and she perceived none of the delicate allusions in Mrs. People's remarks. But she took great interest in Mrs. Justin, and asked many questions about her. The Justins had always kept aloof from the Stulls, and Miss Matilda had never heard the name mentioned. Now, however, she determined that she would make it a point to become acquainted with Mrs. Justin. If the neighborhood was to be made interesting she must know her neighbors.

Miss Matilda soon took her leave, and although John offered to walk with her as far as her father's farm, she declined his services. The road would lead her directly home, she said, and there was ever so much of the afternoon left.

Mrs. People and John accompanied their visitor to the gate, and as she went out she turned to the latter

and said with a smile: "If I thought there was any chance of meeting a bull in the road perhaps I might let you go with me."

If John had read her expression he would have seen that it indicated a desire not to drop wholly the acquaintance of one who might yet be useful to her. But he could find no immediate answer to this remark, and merely allowed himself a melancholy smile. But his mother did not hesitate an instant.

"Now, Miss Stull," said she, "just let me tell you this. Old Mr. Barclay, who lives, himself, down at the Bridge, has got a field just at the turn of the road there, where he most commonly pastur's some cattle, and sometimes he does have a bull among 'em, which it may be cross and it may be not, which is not for you nor me to say, Miss Stull, not havin' seen him. And though Mr. Barclay always does keep up his fences, like a good neighbor as he is, he hasn't been along this way for more'n a week — yes, I guess it's a good two weeks — and I've found out in the course of my life that no farm hand is to be depended on in the matter of top rails bein' up like the master himself. And now, you see, Miss Stull, if there is a bull in that field, and he happens to be a cross one, and some of the top rails has been knocked down, or been left not put up, and none of us not knowin' can say that none of them things isn't, why then it would be a great sight safer, Miss Stull, for you to let my son John walk along with you as far as your father's gate."

Miss Matilda laughed. "Thank you," she said, "but I think I'll take the chances." And she walked briskly away.

## CHAPTER XVI

S Mr. Stratford rode away from the Bullripple farm, his mind was somewhat occupied by conjectures regarding the young lady who was being served with refreshments under the great oak-tree. He began to fear that Mrs. People had been induced to take other boarders, which would be in violation of the verbal contract he had made with her. The notion of it troubled him, especially as nothing had been previously said about it, and this would imply a total change in the frank and communicative manner of his landlady. Resolving to inquire into the matter as soon as he returned to the farm, he put it all behind him long before he arrived at Mrs. Justin's house.

The lady of the mansion was on the piazza, and she was very glad to see him. A return to the friendly intercourse of so many years was delightful to her true soul, as loyal to her friends as to her memories. But her reception of Stratford, warm and cordial as it was, appeared tame and lukewarm when compared to the greeting given him by Gay when that young lady came flying downstairs and out of the front door to meet him. She ran to him with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes and both hands outstretched.

As she looked on at this meeting the spirits of Mrs. Justin fell a degree or two, and her faith in Gay's unalterable devotion to Mr. Crisman wavered for a moment. Never had she seen that young lady so glad to meet her lover. But quickly the assuring reflection came to her that lovers do not exhibit their true feeling before other people, and that Gay's joy at having Mr. Crisman with her was probably shown to him alone. This was all open and free for anybody to see, and meant nothing but that Gay was delighted to meet again this kind friend and teacher. If the girl had suspected for a moment what Stratford had thought about her and Mr. Crisman there would have been no such greeting as this. So the free-hearted openness of Gay's manner to her friend proved the strength of her love for her lover, and the spirits of Mrs. Justin rose to their previous level.

"And now you must tell us," said Gay, "why you have staid away so long. It was very kind of you to take Mr. Crisman fishing. He says he has not had such a good day for ever so long. Everything would have been simply perfect if you had come back with him to dinner, and we all could have talked over the day's adventures."

At this Stratford smiled, but a touch of pity came into his heart when he thought of what a bad day he might make of that good one of which the young man had spoken so cheerily. But all sentiment of this kind quickly vanished as he looked at Gay and thought of Crisman.

Mr. Stratford would not stay to dinner, but he promised to come and dine on the morrow, when Mr.

Crisman would be there. Mrs. Justin and Gay walked with him to his vehicle, and the young girl broke into strong admiration of the horse. Without a thought of anything more than she said, she declared that it must be absolutely delightful to ride behind such an animal as that.

"Wouldn't you like to test it?" said Stratford, "There's plenty of time for a drive of a mile or two."

Gay, with her face full of the most ardent consent, looked at Mrs. Justin, while Stratford remarked that he was sorry the capacity of his vehicle did not permit him to ask them both.

Mrs. Justin hesitated, but quickly concluded that any disapprobation of the drive, such a commonplace thing in itself, would show to Stratford that she did not believe what she had written to him in her letter. So she stiffened her mind with the thought of Gay's fidelity, and she said: "Why not take her a little drive? And some other time you must show me the quality of your horse."

"Do you always drive as fast as this?" exclaimed Gay, when they were on the public road. "What a magnificent horse! His hind legs work like a steam-engine! It's perfectly splendid to see him let himself down with the skin wrinkling on his back, and his ears up. Why, this is going like the wind!"

"I seldom drive so fast," said Stratford, "but I thought you would like a short spurt of speed, and as we have but little time I want to get you up to the Summit as soon as possible. There will be a fine view from there this evening."

"You can't go too fast for me," said Gay, "and I wish the Summit were twelve miles away instead of two.—What! There already!" she exclaimed presently, when they reached a spot where the road began to dip into the valley beneath. "Why, Mr. Stratford, it's a long, long walk!"

"And a short, short spin on wheels," he replied. "And now, look out there! Isn't that worth coming to see?"

Gay had looked upon this view before, but never at this hour. They were on a different side of the ridge from which, sitting on a rail fence, they had once viewed the sunset; and a far wider extent of country was spread out before them. The opening glories of the western sky were at their backs, but beneath them stretched a far-reaching plain, green here with pastures, yellow there with ripening grain, and these brighter colors relieved by great masses of thick forest which seemed to be retiring in irregular columns towards a distant line of mountains which raised themselves, clear and blue, along the horizon. The great, white clouds which floated in the sky were tinged with a delicate pink by the reflections from the west, and over everything there fell the veil of evening, which at this hour softened, without obscuring, the scene.

"This is altogether new," said Gay, her hand unconsciously resting on her companion's sleeve. "I have never seen it like this."

She said little, but her eyes were feasting; and Stratford sat and looked at her. Presently he got

down and opened a gate by the side of the road, and then mounting again to his seat he drove into a field and along a narrow way between rows of corn towards a grassy acclivity which stood higher than the place at which they had first stopped.

"Where are you going?" asked Gay.

"To get a view from a different point," was the answer. "I think you will like it."

She did like it. She actually rose to her feet with a cry of delight. Not far away, and amid the soft beauty of the evening landscape, lay a small and almost luminous sheet of water, shining like a diamond in a rich, dark setting of green banks and overhanging pines.

"A lake!" cried Gay. "A lovely little lake! I never knew there was such a thing in all this country!"

"It is not a lake," said Stratford. "It is nothing but our little Cherry Creek, which makes a broad bend beneath that bank, and shows no more of itself from this point, either coming or going; but it gives a master's touch to the scene; don't you think so?"

"It makes it perfect," said Gay; "simply perfect."

As she gazed, there came into the mind of Gay something she was about to say, but she checked herself. She remembered that the most beautiful and peculiar views she had seen in this neighborhood had been shown to her by Mr. Stratford. She was about to express her gratitude in words which should show her appreciation of this fact, but there came into her mind another recollection with which some feelings of regret were mingled. She determined, on the spot, that one of the things which it was her duty to do for

Mr. Crisman was to induce him to appreciate the loveliness which nature has to show us in a country like this. He not only ought to like them for himself, but he ought to like to see her enjoy them. Of course this could not be expected just now, because, as he had often told her, it did not matter to him where they walked or what he saw, so that she was with him. It was delightful to have Charley think in this way of her, but she wanted him to love hills and valleys and distant mountains and beautiful skies as much as she did. She intended to lead his mind into a true regard for these things, and she knew she could do it.

As they were returning on the high road, going more slowly than when they came, Gay looked at the horse and then at the reins in Mr. Stratford's hands, and then she looked at him, and plucked up courage to ask, in hesitating words, if he would let her drive a little.

"Of course," said Stratford, handing the reins to her; "do you like driving?"

"I have scarcely ever tried it," exclaimed Gay, "but I know I should like it above all things. I used to ride sometimes with the other girls when I was at college, but I believe I should like driving better."

"It depends upon the horse and the country you are in," replied Stratford. "You must draw the reins a little tighter. Let me show you how to hold them."

Gay's ideas of driving were exceedingly crude, but she was a girl of quick observation, and her little hands grasped the reins in exactly the manner which Mr. Stratford, by word or touch, now indicated. The

horse gave his head an approving nod or two as he felt the tightening pressure on his bit, and stepped out well, and the spirit and the life of him seemed to come through the long leathern lines into Gay's hands, and her face was flushed with a new-born pleasure.

"I feel," she cried, as they rolled along, "exactly as if I were doing it all myself."

Stratford laughed, and showed her how to do it better, warning her in good time, before she reached them, of awkward ruts or obtruding stones. Some of these she hit and some she missed; but within her glowed and sparkled the pleasure of the driving, until, with a wholly unnecessary "Whoa!" she drew up at Mrs. Justin's gate.

"I ought to be ashamed to admit it," she exclaimed when, her hands in those of Stratford, she had sprung to the ground, "but I really believe that driving your horse was a greater delight than looking at those lovely views. That ought not to be, but it is."

The next day, Mr. Stratford came to Mrs. Justin's house to dinner, and his hostess found herself doing something which she had never done before. She was watching her guests, particularly Mr. Crisman. She was curious to know what he would think, if Gay should be as glad to see Mr. Stratford as she had been the day before. There was no reason to expect such strong demonstrations of delight, and none such occurred; but there was a show of hearty good-fellowship, as Stratford and the young lady shook each other by the hand, which produced an impression upon Mr. Crisman. It was plain to Mrs. Justin that he was surprised to see it.

In her observations of Stratford the lady of the house hoped to perceive that what she had said in her letter had had its due effect upon him, and although he might not be willing to acknowledge that he had made a mistake, that he would show by his conduct — and Mrs. Justin felt quite able to read her friend's convictions through his conduct — that he had abandoned the mad plan he had proposed to himself.

But she saw no evidence of any such determination. In fact, Mr. Stratford's conduct gave her more concern than it had ever done before. On previous occasions, when he and Crisman had been together at her house, Stratford had been very careful not to obtrude himself upon the lovers, acting in unison with his hostess to give them every opportunity of enjoying undisturbed the society of each other. But now he seemed to treat Gay as a young lady to whom the conversation of one man was as pleasant as that of another. There was no attempt to interfere with Mr. Crisman's efforts to make himself agreeable to Gay; but, on the other hand, there was no attempt to offer him facilities for doing so. The conversation, therefore, continued to be a general one, even for some time after dinner. The talk turning upon foreign cities, a subject in which Gay was greatly interested, Stratford opened a portfolio of photographs collected by Mrs. Justin in an Italian tour, and began to show Gay some of the places they had been talking about.

The soul of the young lady was soon completely absorbed in traveling from temple to palace, from olive grove to crumbling ruin, in company with one

who had seen them all, and who made her feel as if she were really seeing them herself. While this was going on, Mrs. Justin and Crisman continued to converse; but the young man soon became impatient, and, rising, began to walk up and down the room, regarding the couple at the portfolio with evident disapprobation.

The two had come up from Naples, had wandered through portions of Rome, and were in the court-yard of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, when the mind of Gay became troubled. She was greatly enjoying herself, but there seemed to be something wanting; and, looking up, she asked Mr. Crisman if he did not wish to come and look at these photographs and have Mr. Stratford tell him all about them.

"Thank you kindly," said Crisman, "but I don't care for photographs. If I can't see the real thing I am perfectly willing to let it all go by."

Gay made no answer, but her countenance became a little troubled, and she began to turn rapidly the photographs, merely asking a question here and there. Stratford quickly noticed her mood, and the tour by photography was soon brought quietly to an end, as if they had both grown a little tired of it. Crisman had now gone out on the piazza to see what sort of a night it was. Gay followed him to assist him in making his observations, and Stratford saw no more of the two that evening.

Mrs. Justin felt a little provoked with her friend, and somewhat inclined to scold him, and yet, she said to herself, why should she do so? After asking him to come to her house and be the same friend he

had been before, should she now begin to find fault with him for his civilities to her other friends? There was really no occasion to reprove him, and she did not, but she continued to feel dissatisfied with him, all the same. When he took his leave he perceived a little of that dissatisfaction in her manner, but he resolutely took no notice of it. He had decided that enough had been said between him and Mrs. Justin on the subject of Gay and her lover, and of his purpose regarding them; and, so far as it lay in his power, he would avoid saying anything more.

The next morning at breakfast Mr. Crisman allowed himself to make some remarks which were decidedly uncomplimentary to Mr. Stratford. He made no attack upon that gentleman, but he delivered himself of some general opinions which were evidently intended to include Mr. Stratford in their application. The tone and purpose of these remarks were very displeasing to Mrs. Justin. It was not unnatural, although she believed it to be without sufficient reason, that Mr. Crisman should feel somewhat annoyed that a man should engross for a time the attention of his lady-love, but there was no reason whatever why Mr. Stratford should be so spoken of in the house of his friend. Mrs. Justin's eyes flashed a little, and she was on the point of making a sharp reply, but remembering that Crisman was also her guest, she restrained herself, and found a quick occasion to change the conversation. Gay said nothing, but it was easy enough to see that she understood the full purport of Crisman's words. She would have been glad to burst out with the vehement assertion that if

Mr. Crisman intended to include Mr. Stratford among the people he was talking about, he had made a great mistake. But her woman's sense taught her that it would be unwise in her to undertake the defense of Stratford against her lover. She felt it was cowardly to remain silent, but she did so, hoping, however, most earnestly, that Mrs. Justin would speak.

Mrs. Justin did speak. Crisman would not allow the conversation to remain changed, and made another unpleasant allusion to Stratford, more pointed than anything he had said before. This was too much for the hostess to endure, even from a guest, and in a few words, a little more prompt in delivery than she intended them to be, she assured Mr. Crisman that she knew many persons who were extremely willing to impart their information, and very quick to see where such information would be of advantage, but who were neither vain of their knowledge, nor used it as a means of insolently showing their superiority to other people. As an instance of such persons she mentioned Mr. Stratford.

Gay was delighted with this reply, and looked her thanks to Mrs. Justin. The latter noticed them, but received them with slight satisfaction. She was defending her friend for her own sake, not for Gay's.

Crisman smiled. His shot had hit, and the hit had been acknowledged. He was satisfied, and, after remarking that it was all right to stand up for one's friends and that he did not intend to pitch into anybody, he changed the conversation of his own accord, and bore during the rest of the meal the greater part of it himself.

All that afternoon Mr. Stratford was expected by Mrs. Justin and Gay. They hoped he would come, not only because they were always glad to see him, but because they felt that, in a manner, he owed it to himself not to keep in the background when his character had been assailed. To be sure, he did not know that anything had been said against him, but Mrs. Justin and Gay knew it, and that was sufficient reason for them to think he should come forward and show himself. But, on the other hand, they both feared his coming. For every reason they greatly desired peace, and they had some cause to suppose that if Mr. Crisman and Stratford were in the house together that day there might not be peace. This was a very unpleasant thought to think; and Gay, on her part, assured herself that there was not the least reason in the world for thinking it; and yet, being a young person with a sensitiveness of perception which she was not yet capable of appreciating, she thought it all the same. As for Mr. Crisman, he intended, if that very superior gentleman from the Bullripple farm made his appearance at Mrs. Justin's house that day, to give him a cold shoulder, and, if necessary, a sharp elbow. But Mr. Stratford did not come, and although the day proved to be rather a dull one, it was a very placid one.

That afternoon Mr. Stratford took a walk by himself over the fields and hills. He had intended going to Mrs. Justin's, but he, too, had quick perceptions, and, while he had no idea of relinquishing his purposes, he would not intentionally do anything that might disturb the harmony of Mrs. Justin's home,

and he had believed, when on the evening before he had seen Crisman walk restlessly up and down the room, that harmony might easily be disturbed.

Over the fields, that afternoon, also, walked Miss Matilda Stull. When she saw from afar a gentleman crossing the same field, she recognized immediately that this was the Mr. Stratford who lived at the Bullripple farm. Then said Matilda to herself, "How I do wish that he had lived here when I was a little girl playing about these fields; that his uncle had owned a wicked bull; and that I knew him well enough to stop and talk about it. Of course I don't wish that I had met him at a restaurant where I paid him money for my luncheon, but it would be ever so nice if I had made his acquaintance at some suitable place, and could now stop and talk to him about old times. And if he would walk with me, and show me the way, and let down the bars for me — that would be another sort of thing altogether!"

As Mr. Stratford passed, he raised his hat, and Miss Stull slightly bowed. She knew that when gentlemen and ladies met each other in these out-of-the-way places it was quite proper that they should recognize each other's presence. And now Miss Stull walked on with a quick step. It was only the afternoon before that, standing in a little shop, she had seen Mrs. Justin and Gay drive through the village on their way to the station, where they were going to meet Mr. Crisman. And now she had encountered face to face that gentleman who had excited her interest when refreshing herself under the Bullripple oak.

"It is perfectly ridiculous," she said to herself "that all these people should be in this neighbor

hood, and I not know them. None of them have called, but I suppose they haven't the slightest idea we are here. Mother does n't want to know anybody, and is glad to shut herself up. If father were here it would be different; but I am not going to wait for him. They have got to call on us, and I shall make it my business to see that they do it."

## CHAPTER XVII

R. STULL did not go into the country with his family, for it was necessary for him to remain some time longer in the city, in order to give attention to several branches of his varied business which had been neglected when his mind and time had been so greatly occupied by the disturbances at Vatoldi's. But this occasioned no delay in the opening of his operations against the peace and welfare of Enoch Bullripple.

He had no intention of doing anything in his proper person, and his presence was not at all necessary at the scene of action. Without allowing his motives to make any appearance whatever, he had engaged a competent agent to investigate the title-deeds and original surveys of the Bullripple farm; and he had found, as he had expected to find, that not only was the old man's tenure of his property a very uncertain one, having depended for its endurance principally upon the fact that no one had ever cared to investigate its validity, but that there was an equal doubt of legal ownership in regard to the farm which he himself had acquired from Mrs. People. Mr. Stull had reason to suspect this when he bought up the mortgages which eventually gave him possession of

the farm, but the property came to him so easily he was willing to take the risks in regard to the title. Now it would serve his purpose very well, if, when the time came to push Enoch Bullripple to the wall, the old man could also see that Mr. Stull was being pushed. That would make it impossible for Enoch or his nephew to suppose that he had anything to do with the matter.

But Mr. Stull was an excellent manager and a shrewd business man, and he did not propose that the pushing he might receive should hurt him in the least. His present action was not entirely based on his desire to retaliate on the old farmer for the insults and injuries the latter had heaped upon him. If things should turn out as he expected, there was reason to hope that there would be much profit for him in his proposed transactions. The lands in question were not worth very much, looked upon from an agricultural point of view, but it was possible that they might, otherwise, be very valuable. Iron ore in paying quantities had been found in various parts of this region; and Mr. Stull's observations had led him to believe that the rolling country about Cherry Bridge was as likely to contain iron as any of the places where it had already been found. It would please him very well to form a company and put up a smelting-furnace on some spot convenient to the railroad; but, before he did this, he would like to become the owner of as much valuable mineral land in the vicinity as he could lay his hand upon. If there should be iron on his own farm, he would be very willing to give up his present hold upon it in order

to acquire another hold which should be firm and secure; and if the Bullripple property should contain the desirable metal, he would most certainly buy up that property if it were forced into the market.

The agent selected to conduct these investigations was exceedingly well adapted to the work; and, had he not undertaken it, it is doubtful if Mr. Stull could have found any one to whom he would have been willing to intrust it. This individual was Mr. Zenas Turby, who lived in the county town not far from Cherry Bridge, where he engaged in a variety of vocations, most of which had some connection with the law. He collected debts, and took up any odds or ends of legal business which could be attended to by one who was not an actual lawyer. In the course of a long and intrusive life he had picked up a great deal of information, legal and otherwise, which frequently caused him to shine in the light of a useful man. There was one piece of business which most of his neighbors would have been very glad to see him engaged in, and that was an early attendance at his own funeral. But Mr. Turby had declined for many years to gratify this popular desire, and, although now over sixty, was so hale and hearty that the prevailing hope in his direction seemed likely to be much deferred.

Among his other accomplishments Mr. Turby was skilled in the search for iron ore, and this helped in a great degree to make him unpopular. The farmers in this part of the country had no desire to profit by the discovery of ore on their property. The profit they received from the culture of the surface of their

fields was as satisfactory to them as it had been to their fathers, and they did not wish to dig and blast into the bowels of their farms in the pursuit of what might or might not be concealed therein. There were a few who had been shown the errors of this conservatism, but the greater part of them still asserted that they wanted nobody prowling and prying around their farms looking for iron. Even if it should be found, there was at present no furnace in the neighborhood, and, consequently, no immediate demand for the ore; and, more than that, they were unable to rid their minds of their old-fashioned prejudices against allowing other men to come and work upon their lands.

Mr. Turby was very well pleased to take up this piece of business for Mr. Stull. There was gain in it, and, besides, all the fighting that would have to be done would be against Enoch Bullripple, and Turby liked that. For many years, and in various ways, these two had been pitted against each other, whenever occasion could be found for such pitting. Whatever one believed in politics, religion, or in regard to almost anything else, was doubted or denied by the other, and the fact that they were the two sharpest old fellows in that county was reason enough for their being very sharp against each other.

Hitherto Enoch had generally got the better of Zenas Turby, and the latter, therefore, was very zealous in an affair which might give him the upper hand — and a very hard and horny upper hand — of a man who had not failed to get him down whenever it had been possible.

The investigations regarding the title-deeds and surveys of the estates in question had been carried on at the county town, and Mr. Turby having made a satisfactory report upon these, it now remained to look into the iron branch of the business before Mr. Stull definitely determined how he would proceed in the affair. This made it necessary for Zenas Turby to visit the village of Cherry Bridge; and to Cherry Bridge he came.

It was on a rainy morning that Mr. Bullripple, mounted on a gray horse which would have been plowing in the corn-field had the weather been fair, rode up to the village house of entertainment, and tied his horse under a shed. There were several men sitting in a large covered porch in front of the house, but the first person Enoch saw was Zenas Turby. It cannot be said that in the mind of either of these men there ever arose a desire for social converse with the other, and yet, whenever they happened to meet, each experienced certain snappy emotions which were not unpleasurable.

"You here, Zenas Turby?" said Enoch, as he took his seat in the one vacant wooden arm-chair, "Haven't seen you in Cherry Bridge for a good while. I thought, perhaps, that sulky of yourn had broke down at last from your havin' forgot yourself and taken somebody in with you."

As he said this Mr. Bullripple smiled, and looked around at the other men sitting in wooden arm-chairs, most of whom being his neighbors returned him an answering grimace of approbation of the little thrust he had given Zenas Turby.

The latter did not smile. He was a strong, heavily built man. His face was smooth-shaven, and the little hair he had on his head was curly and of a reddish, sandy hue which made it difficult to perceive whether it was turning gray or not. He wore a long black coat, and the rest of his clothes and his hat were black, and he carried a stout cane with a long curved handle, well polished by the use of many years. He did not need this cane, but always took it with him when he drove. On such occasions he used it as a prodder with which to remind his horse that time is money; and when walking he carried it as a symbol of authority and a punctuator of his remarks. Now he gave a tap upon the floor which might indicate the opening of a paragraph, and fixing his sharp blue eyes upon his old antagonist, he said: "It's all very well for you, Enoch Bullripple, to keep on talking about my sulky, for I expect there's been many a time when you've wished it held two instead of one, so that you might get a chance of using some other person's horse-flesh instead of your own, but I've lived long enough to know it's a sight better for a man that's got business to attend to to drive about in somethin' that will hold himself and nobody else; so that wherever he goes he won't be asked to give somebody a lift who's too lazy to walk, or too stingy to keep a horse. My sulky carries me about all right, but it won't carry nobody else, and this suits me very well, even if it does sometimes come hard on you, Enoch Bullripple." And the big cane came down on the floor, marking a period apparently very satisfactory to the speaker.

Mr. Bullripple grinned. "There's no man in this county," said he, "outside of a lunatic asylum that would see you driving by with an empty four-seated wagon and ask for a lift in it if he didn't have enough money in his pocket to pay you a little more than common stage fare. And I shouldn't wonder if the reason you stick to a sulky is to keep yourself from the temptation of stagin' without a license."

At this two or three of the company laughed, and Mr. Turby frowned. But Enoch, not caring for any reply to this remark, continued to speak.

"But what brought you up here anyway, Zenas?" he said. "'Tain't the time o' year for collectin' bills. Did you come to look for iron? I've heard you've been goin' into that business."

Now nothing could have angered Mr. Turby more than this remark. Sneers in regard to his narrowness of disposition were not new to him, but he flattered himself that he always succeeded in keeping his business a secret until he chose to divulge it. But here, at the very first question, Enoch had hit upon the object of his visit to Cherry Bridge.

"Whether it's iron or gold or paper money, it's none of your business, Enoch Bullripple. That is to say——" but here he checked himself. He wished to make it very much the business of the other, but that was a matter which must not now be touched upon. "All that I've got to say about iron is just this: that there never was a bigger fool than the man who'd go on plowin' and workin' his stony old fields and not get enough in any year to pay his hon-

est debts, when all he has to do is to say the word and have a company dig iron out of his hills — and not hurt his fields and pastures nuther — and pay him fifty cents for every load of ore took out. But there are fools of that kind and plenty of 'em, who might live in comfort and send their children to school if they only had sense enough to let other people come and get out of their farms the only thing worth gettin' out of 'em."

"It's one thing," said Enoch, "to own land with minerals in it and to go to work and get them minerals and make money on 'em. But it's altogether another thing to have a man come that p'raps don't know no more about it than that p'inter dog, and dig here, there, and anywhere, on your farm, and then go off and say that there ain't iron enough on it to make a horse-shoe, and so spile your chance of sellin' a part of your land if a company ever did come along that wanted to buy it. Nobody wants a fellow huntin' for iron on his place who's got a report to sell to the highest bidder."

This was a hard hit, because a story had once been told that a farmer in the neighborhood of the county town had been urged by Mr. Turby to employ him to make a report on the mineral value of his lands, offering as a reason that it would be much better for the owner of a farm if the investigating agent had his interests at heart instead of those of the would-be purchaser. As the country people of that region had an old-fashioned idea that a report should be a simple statement of facts without refer-

ence to the interests of any particular employer, this story thickened the cloud that for a long time had shaded Mr. Turby.

Zenas frowned and looked steadily at the floor. "I shouldn't think," said he, speaking slowly but very forcibly, "that a man that goes off on some sort of a shindy in the very busiest part of the year and leaves his farm to take care of itself and go to rack and ruin fur all he knows, ought to have anythin' to say about what industrious fore-handed people choose to do with their lands."

"A part of what you say, Zenas Turby," answered Mr. Bullripple, "is exactly right, and that is that you shouldn't think. Thinkin' is a business that you ain't suited for. There's a good many kinds of work that you can do first-rate, but you ought to get somebody else to do your thinkin'. You was just right when you said you shouldn't think."

At this there was a burst of laughter from the men in wooden arm-chairs; and Mr. Turby rose to his feet to make an angry reply. But he was not so quick of speech as was Enoch, and the moment the laughter ceased, the latter, also rising, got in ahead of his antagonist, and remarked: "I haven't got no time to stay here any longer palaverin' about iron lands. But I'll just say this, Zenas Turby, that it's a mighty good thing when a farmer gets his place in such a condition that when he wants to go away for a while to attend to some other business, it can run itself."

## CHAPTER XVIII

ISS MATILDA STULL was very well aware that in her endeavors to get into the Cherry Bridge society she need not depend in the least on her mother. That lady was too glad to get away from the irksome and often embarrassing social demands of the city to wish now for society of any kind. Usually spending the summer at some fashionable watering-place, the quiet of this mountain farm-house gave her a sense of delightful repose she had not known for years, and she was entirely satisfied with the protracted absence of her husband, who, if he had been upon the scene, would most probably have insisted, as he always insisted elsewhere, that she should push to the front of whatever society she might find about her and make herself clearly visible as the wife of J. Weatherby Stull.

But the eldest daughter of the house felt that she was quite able to further her own interests in this matter, and, with this view, she set out on a walk to see Mrs. People. When her father should return she knew that she would be obliged to take the horses and the carriage when she wanted to go about the country, but now it suited her purpose much better

to walk. It was easier to meet people, and perhaps to stop and talk with them, when walking than in driving in the carriage. She looked upon Mrs. People as the only present thread of connection between herself and the Cherry Bridge gentry, and it was her intention to make that good woman understand that it was her duty to impress upon the mind of Mrs. Justin the importance of an early call upon the ladies of the Stull family, people of high position who had recently arrived in the neighborhood. She did not attempt to deceive herself with the notion that anxiety to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Justin was at the bottom of her intended action, but she freely admitted to her own consciousness that through that lady the acquaintance of gentlemen, often a most necessary adjunct in the enjoyment of country life, would probably be made.

She was yet some little distance from the Bullripple house, when she met John People, who was coming toward her on the narrow path through the grass at the side of the road. John was in his shirt-sleeves. He wore a broad straw hat, and on his shoulder he carried a hay-rake. His portly and upright figure appeared so well in this rural guise that Miss Stull could not help wishing for a moment that he were a gentleman disporting himself thus for his own pleasure, instead of being the son of that fat Mrs. People, taking a holiday from his restaurant, and working on the farm. Had she expected no other opportunities of male society during her country sojourn, Miss Matilda would have been willing to ramble over the woods and fields with the sturdy John; but, as she

had a lively hope of doing something better in this line, she now looked upon him only in the light of a possible stepping-stone to some advantageous foothold.

"Good-morning, Mr. People," she said, "isn't this a beautiful day?"

John returned the salutation, and, taking off his hat, exposed to view his short yellow locks, as smoothly and evenly brushed as Miss Stull had ever seen them at Vatoldi's.

"Are you going to work in the fields?" she said presently, as the two stopped.

"I was going," said John, with an emphasis upon the "was" intending to indicate that such should not be his present purpose if Miss Matilda gave him an opportunity of remaining in her society.

Miss Matilda understood the intonation perfectly, and she hesitated for a moment before she spoke. If the mother should happen to be away it might be a good thing to take a walk with the son, and if she could derive no other advantage from the ramble she felt that she could obtain from John some additional information in regard to the persons whose acquaintance she desired.

"Is Mrs. People at home?" she said, "and disengaged?"

"Oh, yes," said John, "and she will be very glad to see you. There's a lady in the house now, but I don't think she intends to stay very long."

"Who is it?" asked Miss Stull quickly.

"It is Miss Armatt, the young lady who is staying with Mrs. Justin."

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Matilda. "I think I'll go in and make a little call on your mother. Good-morning."

John stepped aside to let her pass, and over his face there came a shadow of disappointment. He did not know exactly what he had expected, but, whatever it might have been, he was not going to get it, and he could not prevent the shadow.

"Won't you walk with me as far as the gate?" asked Miss Matilda with a smile. "I don't always understand the opening of these big gates."

She was not a workman who dropped her chisel and saw into the dust and chips whenever she did not happen to be using them.

When, with another smile, she parted from John at the gate, she stepped very quickly towards the house. Miss Armatt's presence there was a rare piece of good fortune, and she was very anxious to arrive before that lady left.

Gay had walked over, across the fields, on an errand for Mrs. Justin, who was very glad to give her young friend an object for her morning walk, and thereby secure for herself the uninterrupted company of Mr. Stratford, who had come, by appointment, to assist her in the auditing of some complicated accounts of the association of which they both were members.

Mrs. People was about half through one of her long statements of facts when Miss Stull appeared, and she and Miss Armatt were made acquainted.

The visit of the two young ladies proved to be quite a long one, for Mrs. People was very anxious to talk. Miss Gay did not wish to leave until she had fully

attended to her errand, and Miss Matilda did her best to make herself agreeable without regard to the passage of time. When, at last, Gay had said that she positively must go, and her business had been promptly brought to a conclusion, Miss Stull discovered that she would not be going out of her way if she should walk over a field or two with her new-made acquaintance, and so they set out together.

Mrs. Justin and Stratford, having finished their business, were standing together on the piazza, when the former exclaimed:

"Who's that coming over the field with Gay?"

Stratford looked steadfastly, but at first he was unable to answer. Presently, however, he recognized the young lady whom he had seen at the Bullripple farm, and in regard to whom he had made inquiries of Mrs. People.

"That," said he, "is a daughter of J. Weatherby Stull. His family are, at present, at his farm. But it seems rather odd that Miss Armatt should be acquainted with his daughter."

Mrs. Justin had never heard anything of J. Weatherby Stull that she liked. It was during the life-time of her husband that Stull had acquired his present possessions in the neighborhood, and Mr. Justin had been very indignant at the relentless manner in which Mrs. People had been driven from her home. Even if she had not looked upon the opinions of her husband as a guide for her own judgments, Mrs. Justin would have despised the things that Mr. Stull had done, and would have despised the man who did them. He had lived very little on his farm after it

had come into his possession, and, while there, it had never entered into the mind of Mrs. Justin that it was possible for her to call upon his family. She had heard that they had again come into the neighborhood, but, although much of her old resentment at the man's actions had faded away, she did not consider the Stulls as people with whom she had the least concern, and had almost forgotten that she had been told of their coming.

Mrs. Justin looked gravely at the two young women, who had now stopped and appeared to be talking quite earnestly. "I don't understand it," she said; "Gay never mentioned the Stulls to me, and that does not look like a recent acquaintanceship. They are evidently taking leave of each other, and yet it seems impossible for them to tear themselves apart."

This difficult deed was, however, accomplished, and while Miss Matilda turned back and took her way across the fields, Gay came hurrying homeward. She threw herself into a piazza chair and made her report, and it was plain enough to her hearers that she had been very favorably impressed by Miss Stull.

"She's a very nice girl," she said, "and as friendly as she can be. She intended to walk only a little way with me, but we had so much to say that we got almost here before we knew it. I wanted her to come in and rest herself, but this she would not do, for she seems to be very particular about such things, and said it would not be proper for her to come here before any of this family had called upon her mother and herself. I suppose we ought to call on them as

soon as we can," she continued, turning to Mrs. Justin. "I should think they would be very pleasant neighbors. And what I particularly like about Miss Stull is that she seems so much fonder of this country than of the fashionable places she is in the habit of going to."

Mrs. Justin did not immediately answer. She had an instinctive aversion towards anything that bore the name of Stull, but her conscience would not allow her to believe that the sins of a husband and father should be visited upon a wife and daughter, and she could readily understand that it would be a severe punishment to ladies accustomed to society to find themselves in a country place where their few neighbors would not associate with them. But it is possible that even these conscientious and kindly feelings would not have been sufficient to urge her to an early movement in the direction of her social duties to the new-comers had not a fresh motive come to their assistance. It was evident that Gay had conceived a liking for Miss Stull, and it occurred to Mrs. Justin that if her young protégée could form a friendship with one of her own sex and age, it would interfere very much with that friendship for Mr. Stratford about which she found that she still had some fears, notwithstanding the fact that she had persuaded herself that Gay's love for Crisman would be invulnerable against all attacks, whether made under the guise of friendship or any other sentiment.

She was glad to find that Mr. Stull was not expected to join his family very soon, and that his daughter had said that, when he came, he probably would not stay long.

Miss Matilda had heard that there had once been unpleasant feelings between her father and the Justins, and she was a young woman who generally knew what to say and when to say it.

If, therefore, there was but little chance of having anything to do with Mr. Stull, it might be well, so reasoned Mrs. Justin, to call upon his wife and daughter; and if the latter should appear to be the extremely pleasant young lady that Gay thought her to be, a companionship between the two would probably be a desirable thing. Gay's enthusiasm over this new acquaintance was very encouraging to Mrs. Justin. "That seems to be her natural disposition," she thought, "in regard to friendships, and it may not mean as much as I supposed it did."

She therefore determined that she would call on the Stulls. But when this decision was announced to Mr. Stratford he gave it a cold approval. It was well enough, he remarked, to be courteous to new-comers, but he had always had a great dislike for Stull himself, and from the little he had seen of his daughter he did not believe that her companionship was needed by Miss Armatt. But Mrs. Justin laughed — was he such a judge of the nature of girls that he could tell their capabilities and qualities by a glance or two?

## CHAPTER XIX

A FEW days after the entrance of Miss Matilda Stull into the Justin field of view, Mr. Horace Stratford was driving slowly along one of the by-roads in the neighborhood of Cherry Bridge. It was about the middle of the afternoon, and he was starting out on one of those mountain drives with which he varied his fishing and walking experiences. He had allowed his horse to fall into a small jog-trot; for, a sensible man will not drive fast over the ordinary by-road of mountainous neighborhoods when his mind is fixed upon a subject entirely unrelated to roads and driving.

Mr. Stratford's mind was intently fixed upon the subject of his plans and purposes regarding the future welfare of Miss Gay Armatt. His desire to promote this welfare was as strong as ever, and his belief in the justice of his purposes was unshaken, but his hopes of their success were not quite so bright as they had been. He could not but admit to himself that while he had made upon the mind of this young lady quite as forcible an impression of the value of worthy male companionship as he had expected to make, that impression had not produced the result which he had hoped from it. Miss Gay,

indeed, appeared capable of entertaining, at the same time, a true and earnest friendship for one man and a true and earnest love for another man. Thus, while he had gained for himself a most charming and sympathetic friend, Mr. Crisman still retained a loyal lady-love. Now, while Stratford had no objection whatever to make for himself a charming friend, that was not the ultimate object of his carefully considered conduct towards Gay Armatt. If Mr. Crisman's hold upon the girl were not loosened, it mattered little to her future what hold any one else retained upon her.

"Perhaps," said Stratford to himself, "Mrs. Justin may be right, and the girl, having plighted her word, will stand to her promise through good or evil." Now, this blind constancy was a quality of the soul of which Stratford did not approve. Adherence to the wrong under any circumstances was, in his opinion, unworthy of a true man or woman. If, by any means, by comparison with other men, or by direct study of his character, Gay should discover that her lover was not the man she would have chosen had she deferred her decision until a little more age and a little more experience had given her better powers of judgment in regard to what a husband should be, then Gay was false to herself, and, in a manner, to Crisman also, if she married him.

If Mr. Stratford had been consulted on the subject of the young lady's action after she had arrived at this conviction, he would have advised a clear and frank statement of her change of views, coupled with a proposition that the engagement be set

aside by mutual consent. He truly believed that if women were to do this when they found they had made a mistake in the plighting of their affections, not only would they avert a great deal of future unhappiness, but they would find the matter much easier than they had supposed. The lover might flout and rebel at first, but there were ten chances to one that, if the engagement had existed for any considerable length of time, he would have discovered for himself that the cog-wheels of the attachment did not run smoothly together, and that he would be willing to separate them before they had become worn or injured. It often happens that it is easier for an inferior man to sever his attachment to a superior woman than it is for her to disengage her affections from him. The material of the attachment in the first instance is of poorer quality.

But as Stratford was a sensible man, as has before been said, he did not expect any such severe moral action on the part of Gay Armatt. He had hoped no more than that she might gradually grow away from Crisman, and Crisman, consequently, dropping away from her, the engagement would come to an end without any particular effort on either side. But, so far as he could now see, nothing of this kind seemed likely to happen.

"I have not understood," reflected Stratford, "the varied powers of sympathetic action which exist in the soul of this young girl. I came to her as a friend, and she has received me as a friend, whereas with Crisman she connects no idea but that of love. Consequently, she has never made any comparison

between us. If I wish to make an impression which shall be of the slightest use, I must get her to compare me with her lover. At first I thought I was about to succeed in this, but now I have my doubts. She takes him for what he is, and me for what I am, and is perfectly satisfied with us both."

It may be said here that if Mr. Stratford's ability to read the mind of a young girl had been as great as his belief in the obviousness of his superiority to Crisman, he might not have come to this conclusion. He was in the not unusual position of a person who doubts his ultimate success at the very moment he begins to succeed. Gay had already compared her lover, and that not favorably, with her friend.

Mr. Stratford was so absorbed in his important cogitations that his horse now fell into a contemplative walk, and the two proceeded very slowly.

"But," Stratford continued in his converse with himself, "I do not wish her to look upon me as a lover. In the first place, I am not her lover in the least degree. And, again, I should consider it dishonorable and entirely opposed to the spirit of my plan, even to appear to be her lover. I would like her to look upon me as a man who might be somebody's lover, and, in that regard, to compare me with Crisman. I would like her to say to herself, 'If some one may have the love of a man like Mr. Stratford, who will appreciate her tastes and her aspirations as he will appreciate them, who will sympathize with and help her as he will sympathize with and help her, and who will, in every way, offer her that sufficient companionship which he will offer her, why may not

my lover be such a man?' If I can induce her to ask herself this question, and then seriously to consider whether or not Crisman is that sort of man, I shall be perfectly satisfied."

Easier were the tasks of tangled skeins and wind-driven feathers set by wicked step-mothers to forlorn princesses in the olden tales than was the task which this man now proposed to himself. And yet, without the slightest hope of the assistance of a fairy god-mother, he steadfastly set his mind upon it.

"Upon my word," exclaimed Stratford, speaking out in very decided tones, and drawing up his horse to a full stop, "this is exactly like a story in a book! Only it is too improbable."

"What do you mean?" asked Gay, who had just emerged upon the road from a broad pathway through the woods.

"I mean," said Stratford, "that I am busily thinking of you when you suddenly appear in the most unexpected manner, and in the most unexpected place."

"The place and the manner are simple enough," she said. "Mrs. Justin has gone to call on the doctor's wife, and after that she will drive over to the railroad station to pick up Mr. Crisman, and I thought I would kill the time until they came back by going out to look for rhododendrons, but it must be rather early for them, for I have found only this one little sprig."

And she held up a small cluster of the delicately tinted pink and white blossoms for which she had been searching.

"It is not too early for them," said Stratford, "but you would be likely to find only straggling bushes along that pathway. It would be difficult for you to go where they are abundant. But why did not you visit the doctor's wife?"

He would have been glad to extend the question, but saw no appropriate way of doing so.

"I don't care about going to see strangers," said Gay, "and as we called upon the Stulls two days ago, I thought that was enough ceremony for me in one week."

"If you will allow me," said Stratford, "I will say that, however much you may desire to escape from social boredom, it is not right for you to be wandering by yourself in these woods."

Gay laughed. "There is nothing in the world to hurt me except snakes; and, do you know, I have tried hard to see a snake, but never could. And now tell me how you came to be thinking about me."

"It may have been," said Stratford disingenuously, "that I had some premonition of your appearance, but I don't believe it. I could not even have imagined that you would be wandering in these woods by yourself, and, really, Miss Armatt, you ought not to do it. But I am delighted to see you, for now I shall ask you to take a drive with me. You will come, will you not?" and as he spoke he stepped down from the buggy.

Gay looked at him with a little smile upon her lips. "May I drive?" she said.

Her expression as she smiled and spoke, with her head a little on one side as she looked at him, was very youthful and very charming; for Gay, when she

slid down the straw-stack, had not, as she supposed, left all her girlishness behind her. But Stratford was not altogether pleased. He did not wish to teach her to drive; he did not want to appear in the character of a tutor of any kind. But he answered promptly, "Certainly you shall do as you choose; drive or be driven. All that I ask is the pleasure of your company."

"How easily pleased!" said Gay. And almost before he could touch her arm to assist her, she had stepped into the buggy.

"No," said Stratford, "you must not sit there. You must sit on the right side. If you drive you must do it properly."

"That will be delightful," said Gay, quickly changing her seat. "I do so like to do things in a regular way."

It did not altogether satisfy Stratford that Gay's pleasure in the mere act of driving seemed to exclude every other motive for wishing to accompany him. But he put the reins into her hands, adjusting them with much care, and made her also hold the whip.

"In difficult driving," he said, "you should have the whip in your hand, in order that you may touch your horse if he hesitates."

"Is this to be difficult driving?" asked Gay.

"Yes," he said. "These rough country roads demand constant care and prudence, or you might find yourself in trouble."

"Oh, I like that!" said Gay, settling herself squarely in her seat, "and I am going to be awfully particular. Will you jump in?"

"Before I do so," said Stratford, "I must ask you to turn your horse to the right, and separate the wheels on this side. As you are the driver, that is part of your duty to your companion."

Gay laughed as she turned the horse rather more than was necessary on one side. "This is simply perfect!" she exclaimed. "I feel as if I were managing everything. Are you quite comfortable, sir?" she added when Stratford had taken his seat.

"Go on," he said, laughing, but quickly exclaimed, "Not so fast! You will dash us to pieces against some stone or stump."

Gay drew in the horse, and then Stratford, in spite of his dislike of appearing on this occasion in the rôle of a teacher, proceeded to instruct his companion in the art of eluding the rocks, ruts, stumps, and fallen branches with which this seldom-used road was frequently obstructed. She applied herself with much earnestness to the difficulties of her task, but Stratford, desiring to put an end to this soul-absorbing occupation, which did not suit his purposes, and must, eventually, tire his companion, directed her to turn into a road in the woods which would shortly lead into the highway.

"You should have told me to beware of these branches," he said, as he pushed aside a protruding bough. "To be sure, I saw them myself, but it is the driver's place to give warning of such things."

"I don't take much care of you, do I?" said Gay, turning around and looking up into his face with a glance of laughing kindliness. "I ought to manage things so that you would never have the least bit of

a brush or a bounce. There now!" she cried, as a sweeping branch took off her hat, "I was thinking so much of you that I forgot myself. Whoa, sir!"

Stratford jumped out and picked up the hat, and when he resumed his seat Gay requested him to put it on for her, as her hands were so full.

"And I am going to ask you," she said, as Stratford placed the hat on her head, and adjusted, not very awkwardly, an elastic band beneath the thick coil of hair, "if you will not hold this whip until we get out of the woods. It is really too much for me to have to attend to the reins, the whip, the stumps, the bushes, and you."

When they turned into the broad, open road, Gay had the pleasure of a mile or two of good rapid driving. During this period of delight they met an open carriage, drawn by two horses, driven by a coachman, and containing a lady. Gay was so much occupied in keeping her horse exactly midway between the right-hand side of the road and the left-hand wheels of the other vehicle that she could do no more than give a little nod as she swiftly passed the carriage.

Stratford took off his hat, and then remarked to Gay that it was a pity Miss Stull had to drive about the country by herself.

"Yes," said Gay. "Her mother does not care to be out-of-doors, and she does not like to have her younger sisters with her. She said she would come to take me to drive, and perhaps she is now on her way to our house."

"Do you wish to turn back?" said Stratford.

"No, indeed," she answered. "That was the merest supposition of mine. And besides, even if she does want me, why should I slight your invitation for one from her?" And she gave the horse a little touch of the whip, of which she had again taken possession.

Gay's prompt decision was a very gratifying one, but Stratford could not help asking himself if her preference for his company was not due, in some degree, to the fact that she was driving.

Presently he made a proposition. "How should you like," said he, "for me to take you on a mountain drive? It will be a novel experience for you."

"I shall like it ever so much," said Gay, "and if you want my seat I am quite ready to give it up, for this tight-rein driving has begun to tire my wrists."

"In the work we have before us," said Stratford, "I shall certainly want the driver's seat."

They now stopped at a gate by the side of the road, and, Stratford having opened it, Gay drove through, and then he took the reins. They passed at a good trot along a cart road which wound through a field of young corn, and, leaving this by another gate, they emerged upon a wide stretch of grassy hillside, interspersed with bushes, rocks, and trees. They skirted the base of the hill, following a track that gave some indications of being a road, and which, by a series of gentle ascents, brought them to a forest on the side of a line of low mountains. Here Stratford turned into a wood-road which for some time led them steadily upward. At a point with which he seemed very well acquainted he turned boldly into the woods, and wound in and out among the trees, which here, being

principally pines, were little encumbered with underbrush, until he emerged upon the open mountain-side, where could be seen no track of wheel or hoof.

"You did that splendidly," said Gay. "I can't imagine how you dared to drive right in among the trees."

"I have been through that way before, and knew I could find a free passage. And now, my lady, I want to warn you that we are going to leave everything which resembles civilized driving. Do you think you shall be frightened?"

"I am sure you will not take me into any dangerous places," she said.

"There will be no danger whatever," he answered. "I shall go nowhere where I have not driven before; and although we shall pass over a great deal of shelving ground, I assure you that we shall not upset."

"If you say it is safe, I am perfectly satisfied," said Gay. "Please go on."

Stratford now proceeded at a steady walk along a slight terrace upon the mountain-side which afforded a very good roadway. To the left the vast forest stretched upward, while to the right lay a long green valley closed on three sides, and utterly wild and uninhabited. Very soon they rounded a turn in the mountain-side, and here the terrace disappeared. The surface of the ground, however, was diversified by rounded knobs and horizontal shelves of projecting rock, and the general incline, even in the smoother places, was not great.

Around and over the inequalities of the ground Stratford steadily made his way, taking advantage of

every favoring surface; but, in spite of his carefulness, the buggy sometimes tipped very much to one side.

"You are sure we can't upset?" asked Gay.

"Quite sure," Stratford replied. "It would be extremely difficult to overturn a low-hanging vehicle like this, and everything about the buggy and harness is strong and intended for rough work."

"It is delightfully exciting," said Gay, "and I don't intend to be afraid. The view is getting better all the time."

"When we round that next point, just beyond us," said Stratford, "we shall have the view I brought you here to see. It is different from anything else in the neighborhood."

Having reached the point indicated, Stratford stopped, and they looked out on a scene of solemn grandeur. Below them was a deep and vast ravine, through which a dark river of tree-tops seemed to run into the valley they had first seen. Beyond this ravine rose a heavily wooded mountain, and to the right of that, and back of it, stood other mountain peaks, purpled by the distance. Still farther, towering high on the left, its eastern side now dark in shadow, stood the loftiest mountain of them all, looking down upon its lower brethren with a certain stern solemnity, while between it and the nearest peak Gay could see, far, far away, a line of light-blue mountain waves against the sky. For a few moments she sat without a word, and then she exclaimed:

"What magnificence! I never knew we had such mountains near us!"

"They are the same mountains we always have in view," said Stratford, "only we are on a point where we can see between their broken lines, and not merely look up against them as we generally do."

The spot where they had stopped was the most available one in the vicinity for a mountain view, but the ground was very sloping, and even if they had had plenty of time before them, Stratford would not have taxed the patience of his horse by requiring him to keep a stationary position there very long. After devoting some minutes to Gay's intense enjoyment of the scene, he told her they must now turn round and go back; and as this turning round on the mountain-side might excite nervousness in the mind of a lady, he proposed to Gay that she should get out of the buggy while he performed this feat.

"Are you going to stay in?" she asked.

"Of course," he answered.

"Then so am I," said Gay.

Stratford made no further remark, but, driving upon a projecting knoll, he backed the buggy up on a shelf of rock behind it, and, turning the horse, drove down again to the spot where they had been standing. He knew what he was about, and his horse was perfectly trustworthy; but the knoll was very small, and the downward view from the outer border of it was likely to give one a good idea of the precipitous.

Stratford drove a short distance along the mountain-side, and then he drew up his horse. "Now," said he, "I am going to give you your choice. We can either go back the way we came, which you know is a long road, or I can drive down the mount-

ain-side, which is not very steep just here, and when we reach the valley we shall find a wood-road which will lead us to that low hill, over there. Having crossed that, we shall soon find ourselves upon one of Mrs. Justin's farm-roads, which will take us directly to the house."

"Oh, let us go that way, by all means!" said Gay. "It must be ever so much nearer, and, after what we have done, I am ready for anything."

"Very good," said Stratford; and he began the descent of the trackless mountain-side. He did not go directly down, but wound along in a serpentine way among the rocks, low-growing bushes, and over occasional stretches of coarse grass, which would sometimes have proved difficult of passage had not the yielding mold given a sure foothold to the horse. Gay was very merry over the varied contingencies of this novel drive, although she could not refrain from some starts and exclamations when they found themselves going straight down some short, steep incline with the horse so far beneath the buggy that there seemed to be danger that the vehicle with its occupants would double over upon the steed. Once when the horse, thoroughly well trained in the business of holding back, actually sat down on his haunches, Gay gave a little cry and seized Stratford by the arm.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, instantly relinquishing her hold, "I must not do that or I shall hinder your driving."

Stratford was not afraid of any interference with his driving, but he was a conscientious man, and essayed no unnecessary slopes for the purpose of encouraging an intuitive reliance.

When they reached the valley, and had struck the wood-road, now almost overgrown, which led through a narrow stretch of forest, Gay gave a sigh of relief.

"I can't deny," she said, "that it is a comfort to feel that the buggy-wheels and the horse's feet are on a level with each other. But I would not for anything have missed that mountain drive! It had more of delightful adventure about it than anything that ever happened to me. But I would not have allowed any other man in the world to drive me where you drove me."

"And let me say to you," said Stratford, turning towards her, "that I know no other woman than yourself whom I could have trusted to be brave enough to trust me absolutely and entirely."

"I like to hear you say that," said Gay, with an expression that could not be mistaken for anything else than honest earnestness.

So far, although these two had spent a good part of the afternoon together, they had had but little conversation except that which had been called forth by the unusual character of the surrounding circumstances, and this condition of things Stratford thought had lasted quite long enough. He certainly did not regret the circumstances, because they had pleased Gay, and had brought out in a strong light some interesting points in her disposition. But now he was glad that the rest of their trip would be uneventful.

"You are pleased, then," Stratford said, "that I think well of you?"

"Indeed I am!" exclaimed Gay. "I am a great deal more than pleased. Do you know," she continued,

"that it seems very strange, in fact it is absolutely funny, when I think in what a different way I regard you now from that in which I looked upon you when I first knew you. I don't mind telling you that I liked you ever so much from the first day. Then I used to wish that you were my father, and to think that it would be perfectly charming to have such a father, entirely forgetting that you did not begin to be old enough to be a father to me. After that I wished you were my brother. But that did not last very long; for, if you analyze the relationship of a brother, which I have done, having a very good brother who is a professor in a college out West, you will find that he is wanting in some of the varied qualities of companionship; at least, that is what I discover in my one specimen. Now, in you I find no want of the kind."

"Am I to understand," said Stratford, "that you have analyzed my character?"

"Indeed I have," she replied. "In fact, I have done so two or three times."

"And what is the result?" he asked. "And in what light do you now regard me?"

"The result is," said Gay, "that it is impossible to place you in any class. I tried it and utterly failed. So I am going to let you stand all alone, by yourself."

Whatever of approbation there was in Gay's words or manner, there was nothing to indicate that she had ever thought of putting him into that class of men who, not being fathers or brothers, might, upon occasion, make love.

"Do you analyze everybody?" he asked.

"Oh, no indeed!" said Gay promptly. "Only a very few persons. You more than anybody else."

"Am I, then, so very difficult to understand?"

"I do not think you would have been," said Gay, "if I had known you a long time, and had, in a manner, grown up with you; but, you see, you came upon me so suddenly and swiftly, and I have known you so fast, if you understand that, that I had to look very closely into the matter in order to comprehend it all."

"And do you comprehend it?" he asked.

"I think so," said Gay.

"And are you satisfied?"

"Perfectly," she answered.

Stratford was not perfectly satisfied. "I wish," said he, "that I could have been put among those persons who do not need to be analyzed."

Gay turned upon him suddenly. There was a little frown upon her brow, but when she spoke she could not help smiling. "You are dreadfully grasping," she said. "Here I have been putting you up higher and higher, on a loftier pedestal every time, and yet you are not satisfied."

"Pardon me," said Stratford, "but if you had ever analyzed yourself you would not be surprised that I am hard to satisfy."

"Now I wonder what that means!" said Gay. "Are you going on developing and changing, so that I shall have to analyze you again?"

"I hope you will not do it," he answered quickly, "if there is any danger of my being placed on a lower pedestal, or perhaps being toppled over altogether."

"Don't you be afraid of that," said Gay, involuntarily laying her hand upon his arm. "And I'll tell you one way in which I think of you. I have a feeling that if you were to ask me to do anything, I should instantly go and do it. What do you think of that, sir?"

A thought had come with much promptness to Stratford, and he had said to himself that if he could thoroughly believe what Gay had said, he would impress the seal of happiness and success upon her life by instantly demanding that she should give up the man who would be to her like a worm at the root of all to which her ardent young soul looked forward. But he did not believe her, at least to such an extent, and he kept this thought to himself.

"You do me the greatest honor," he said, "by placing such trust in me; and I wish I could tell you to do something which would make you happy for the rest of your days."

Gay turned and looked at him with an expression of inquiry which seemed somewhat foreign to her face, for her desires to know were generally promptly expressed in words. But now she said nothing, and, turning again from Stratford, sat quietly looking out before her.

They had now crossed the valley and had reached the top of the rounded hill upon the other side. The day was drawing to a close, and in this exposed position the evening wind came fresh and cool upon them. Gay's dress was thin, and Stratford, without remark upon the subject, stooped forward and drew from under the seat a light woolen lap-robe which had hitherto been unneeded. This he placed around Gay's

shoulders, carefully arranging it so as to protect her well from the somewhat chilly mountain breeze.

"Thank you," said Gay. And then she went on with her thinking.

Among the many things which came into the mind of Stratford on their homeward road was the conviction that this mountain drive had occupied more time than he had expected it would, and that Crisman must have arrived at least an hour ago at Mrs. Justin's house. He wondered if Gay was thinking about this, but, if so, she certainly manifested no anxiety upon the subject. Comfortably wrapped up, with her hands folded under her improvised shawl, she nestled quietly in her corner of the buggy as if she were perfectly satisfied with everything that was.

## CHAPTER XX

ISS Matilda Stull, who really was on her way to invite Miss Gay Armatt to drive with her, was very much surprised when that young lady, in company with Mr. Stratford, rapidly passed her on the road. She turned quickly, and looked back at them, saying to herself: "Is it possible that I have been mistaken, and that that is the man she is engaged to? I don't understand it, for they certainly told me that the one I saw in the carriage with Mrs. Justin is named Crisman, and that he comes up every Saturday, on account of the engagement. But that doesn't look like it, I must say! And this is Saturday afternoon too!"

In all matters which pertained to love, engagements, or marriage, Miss Matilda took a deep and abiding interest, and in this affair, so immediately within her observation, her interest was greater than usual. The apparent complications of it which had suddenly arisen in her extremely active mind, which needed but very slight impulses to set it working in matters of this sort, puzzled her exceedingly. She could not bring herself to give up her visit to Mrs. Justin's house, where she might hope to lay hold of some clew to this mystery. It was plain that Gay

could not drive with her, but she saw no reason why she should not return Mrs. Justin's call, although her mother was not with her. That lady was as likely to be indisposed one day as another, and she could not afford to let the acquaintanceship she desired depend upon Mrs. Stull's dispositions or indispositions. If that Mr. Crisman were coming to-day, she knew the hour when he should arrive, and determined to plan her own drive so as to reach the house when he should be there. Mr. Stratford and Gay Armatt would be back by that time, and when she saw them all together she could judge for herself how matters stood.

Miss Stull drove about the country for some time, and, when the proper hour arrived, she directed her coachman to turn the horses towards the Justin house. There she found the lady of the mansion and Mr. Crisman, seated upon the broad piazza. Mrs. Justin received the young lady very cordially, and was on the point of stating that Gay had gone for a walk, but would certainly be back in a very short time, when Miss Matilda remarked that she had supposed she might not see Miss Armatt as she had met her driving with Mr. Stratford, but that she had come all the same, because this was a call not only from herself but from her mother, who was extremely grieved that she was not able to make it in person.

At the intelligence thus conveyed by Miss Matilda the soul of Mrs. Justin was smitten by a sudden chill, and the face of Mr. Crisman grew stern and dark. This gentleman had been annoyed when he reached the house and found that Gay was not there

to meet him, and had been talking to Mrs. Justin about the propriety of that young lady keeping her watch properly set and regulated, and carrying it with her when she went out for a walk, so that she would know when she ought to return to the house. But now, when he learned that she had not gone for a walk at all, but was out driving with Stratford, his mind was a good deal darker than his face. He said nothing, but his eyes flashed angrily on Mrs. Justin. That lady glanced at him, caught the flash, and knew instantly that he believed she had told him a falsehood.

"I did not know," she said, addressing Miss Stull, "that Miss Armatt had gone driving. Mr. Stratford must have called for her while I was away, and they will doubtless return presently. And, before I forget it, Miss Stull, did your mother engage that washerwoman I recommended to her? If she does not suit, there is another one who might answer, but she lives at a greater distance."

During the discussion upon washerwomen which followed, Mr. Crisman arose, went into the house, and began to stalk up and down the parlor. A good deal of conversation, mostly on domestic subjects, now took place between Mrs. Justin and her visitor, and, to the great regret of both, it was not interrupted by the arrival of Gay and Mr. Stratford.

Miss Matilda staid just as long as it was possible to extend her visit; and this extension was encouraged by her hostess, who did not at all wish to be left alone with Crisman. Gay had done a very foolish and wrong thing in going away on this Saturday

afternoon with Mr. Stratford, and it was she who should make the explanations and bear the reproaches. At last Miss Stull felt bound to admit to herself that the evening was coming on rapidly, and that she could not with propriety stay any longer, and so departed, disappointed. She had seen very little of Mr. Crisman, she had not made the acquaintance of Mr. Stratford, and she had learned nothing definite in regard to the engagement. She had seen enough, however, to make her believe that everything was not right, and that that young man who was walking so heavily about the parlor was very angry. This convinced her that he was really the engaged man, but she was sorry, very sorry indeed, that the couple in the buggy had not arrived before she left.

The heavens were kind to Mrs. Justin. She had not returned to the house after seeing Miss Stull to her carriage — and it must be admitted that she did not hasten that return — when Stratford and Gay drove up over the grass, coming from the back of the house.

The horse had no sooner stopped than Gay inquired of Mrs. Justin if Mr. Crisman had arrived, and on being told that that gentleman had been there some time and was now in the parlor, she bade Mr. Stratford a hasty farewell, skipped out of the buggy, and hurried into the house. As she hastened past Mrs. Justin, that lady felt assured that although Gay might be very anxious to meet her lover, her conscience as well as her affection had a good deal to do with the exceeding alacrity with which she went into the house.

"I had no idea," said Mrs. Justin to Stratford,

"that you and Gay were going off to drive this afternoon."

"Nor had I," he answered. "I picked her up on the road. We have had a most delightful drive."

"It may prove anything but delightful to Gay," said Mrs. Justin.

Stratford smiled. "I am very sorry," he said, "that upon this subject you and I should so frequently differ, both in our desires and our expectations."

"And I am also very, very sorry," said the lady.

And then Mr. Stratford drove away at dinner time without being invited to stay to dinner. This unusual omission was not due to want of hospitality or to resentment on Mrs. Justin's part. That lady did not desire an awkward situation at her evening meal, and Stratford understood her feelings perfectly.

That dinner was indeed an awkward meal, but not as Mrs. Justin had expected it to be. She had looked forward to sitting at table with a black-browed and scowling lover upon whom the sweetness and kind attention of two ladies would make but very faint impression. Instead of that, only she and Gay had dinner together; that is to say, they sat at the table together, but neither of them ate much.

When Mr. Stratford had driven away, and Mrs. Justin had gone into the house after a stroll among the shadows on the lawn sufficiently prolonged to give Mr. Crisman time to get over the brunt of his indignation, she met Gay on the piazza, and immediately asked where Mr. Crisman was.

"I don't know," said Gay, her voice a little shaken either by emotion or shortness of breath. "I haven't

seen him at all. Jane says he went out of the house and down the steps of the back piazza just as Mr. Stratford and I drove round to the front, and that she thought he went into the garden. I ran out there, and have been looking for him everywhere. What do you suppose has become of him? Can it be that he is angry with me, and has gone away?"

Mrs. Justin turned pale, and her paleness was reflected in the face of Gay. "Come into the library," said the elder lady. And they went into the darkening room and sat down together on a lounge.

Now Mrs. Justin spoke to her young friend more plainly than she had ever spoken before. She opened her anxious heart to her, and with earnest affection explained to the young girl the danger she was in. Gay listened with a tear or two but with no words.

When Mrs. Justin had finished, Gay asked: "Do you think he will come back to-night?"

"I have no doubt of it," said the other. "He has probably gone for a long walk, which will cool off his anger; and when he comes back, my dear, it will be your duty to see that he has occasion to take no more such walks."

Then the two went out to dinner.

About half-past nine that evening a boy belonging to the tavern at Cherry Bridge came to the Justin house bringing two letters. One was for Miss Armatt, and one was for Mrs. Justin, and they were both written by Mr. Crisman, who, the boy said, had taken supper at the tavern and would stay there that night.

Gay, who had been reading and waiting and listening all the evening, took her letter in her hand but

did not open it. The pallor on her face when instead of her lover there came this missive was not at all of the reflected sort.

"I think I will go up into my room and read it," she said. And taking a lamp, she went upstairs.

Mrs. Justin sent word to the boy that he need not wait for answers, and then she sat and looked at her letter a long time before she opened it. She was so much averse to a correspondence with Mr. Crisman that once she made up her mind to tear up his letter and refuse to take part in a very unpleasant quarrel which she had earnestly endeavored to avert. But she knew that this would not be just, and she could not but believe that if she read Mr. Crisman's letter and treated him with courtesy, she might thereby be of great service to Gay.

Having come to this determination, she tore open the letter and read it. At the opening words her face began to redden, and as she went on the crimson glow increased. When she finished, the color died out of her face, and she leaned back in her chair and looked out between the parted curtains of the window into the dark night with an expression of somber sternness which was very unusual upon Mrs. Justin's lovely countenance. For a long, long time she sat thus; and it was after twelve o'clock when Gay came quietly into the room.

Mrs. Justin started with surprise. "Why, Gay," she exclaimed, "I did not expect you downstairs again!"

Gay made no answer, but advanced to the table with two letters in her hand, one open, and the other

folded and addressed. Her hair was somewhat rumpled, as if her fingers had been in it; but her dress was unchanged, and she evidently had had no thought of retiring.

"Here is a letter," said Gay, laying the one which was folded and addressed upon the table, "which I should like to have sent to Mr. Crisman as early as possible in the morning. I have ended our engagement."

Mrs. Justin rose to her feet, her amazed eyes fixed on Gay.

"My letter is not sealed," said Gay, "and you can read it if you like. But I think it would be better if you read his letter first."

Mrs. Justin put out her hand for the letter which Crisman had written, and took it as though it were something hot which she feared to touch. She looked at Gay, and then she looked at the letter. Then she read a line or two, and put it down.

"I cannot, Gay," she said; "I cannot read it."

It was Gay who had been hard-stricken, but her nature was young and strong. She bore her blow better than Mrs. Justin bore the one she had received.

"You need not read it," she said. "It would only pain you. I can tell you in a few words what is in it. He upbraids me cruelly for what he calls my faithlessness, and, after saying a great deal for which there is no cause whatever, he orders me to write him a letter asking his forgiveness for what I have done, and promising never to do again the things with which he has charged me. If I do not write such a letter and send it to him immediately, he declares

that everything shall be at an end between us. In my answer I told him that his charges had no foundation at all, and that I would never write the letter he demanded. Did I do right?"

Mrs. Justin's face was flushed, not only by the words which Gay had spoken to her, but by a hot recollection of the letter which she herself had received, in which Mr. Crisman had indignantly charged her with treachery and falsehood, with having encouraged and assisted the attentions of Mr. Stratford during the absence of Gay's rightful lover, and with having made him believe that Gay was out walking by herself when of course she knew that she was driving with that other man.

Never was there a woman who attached more solemn importance to an engagement or promise than did Mrs. Justin. Never was there a woman who looked with more horror upon the breaking of a compact upon which two loving hearts had entered, and yet she stretched out her arms to Gay, and, pressing the girl to her bosom, she said: "You did right, exactly right!"

## CHAPTER XXI

HEN Mr. Crisman, before breakfast the next morning, received Miss Armatt's letter, its effect upon him was to renew the anger which a night's sleep had somewhat sobered down. When he had written to her he had formed no conjectures in regard to her reception of his letter. He meant all that he had written, and his only desire and intent was that Gay should thoroughly understand what he meant. He had not cared to anticipate what she would do when she read it; but when he found what she had done, a most stubborn indignation took possession of him. His nature was one which hardened quickly beneath the sun of angry passion, and when this happened, neither rain, nor kindly warmth, nor the dews of night, nor any blessed breeze, could penetrate its crust.

"Very well," he said, as he tore up Gay's letter, "she loses more than I do." And then he went to breakfast.

The only resolve which Mr. Crisman now made was to the effect that every one should be made to understand that his engagement with the Armatt girl was broken off, and that he was not in the least crushed

by the event. He had come prepared to spend a week at Cherry Bridge, having made arrangements by which his vacation came earlier in the season than usual. He had sent his baggage to the tavern without saying anything to Mrs. Justin about it, preferring first to inform Gay of his intended stay in the neighborhood, and thus give Mrs. Justin an opportunity of inviting him to spend a week at her house. If she did not do so, he would stay at the tavern. But although he had told no one of his intentions, he determined to make no change in them. This was a good place to hunt and fish, and he would stay here and hunt and fish for a week. Then he would go and spend the other week of his vacation in sailing, as he had planned. He liked sailing better than anything else, but having decided to give up half his holidays to the country in which Gay was staying, he would not allow her conduct to influence his plans in any way. If, in the course of his sojourn here, Gay should come to feel that she ought to be ashamed of herself, he would then determine what he would do. But this was to be entirely her own affair. Not one step would he take to lift her out of the pit into which she had deliberately thrown herself. If she chose to climb out and come to him — but he stopped here; he would make no promises, and offer no hopes, even in his own mind. He was obstinately angry.

On that Sunday afternoon Mr. Stratford walked over to the Justin house. He would have preferred not to go, but there were reasons why he thought it would be better for him to do so. Mrs. Justin had

not treated him with her customary cordiality on the evening before, and he did not wish to appear to resent this by omitting his usual Sunday call. He had reason to believe, if he judged from nothing but Mrs. Justin's words, that he would not find the family atmosphere altogether bright and agreeable, but he did not feel himself justified in staying away on that account. If he found a storm there, or the signs of one, he would know that he was the cause of it, and there was no reason why he should shrink from his share of the rains and winds.

He was rounding the foot of an abrupt hill which lay on the extreme boundary of the Bullripple farm when he suddenly came upon a man who was making a shallow excavation in the soil with a small pickaxe. It was such an uncommon thing to find any one in this part of the country working in the fields on Sunday, that Stratford was quite surprised at the sight. In a moment, however, he perceived that this was not an ordinary laborer, but an elderly man dressed in black, who was, apparently, interested in geology.

"Good afternoon," said Stratford.

The man turned suddenly, and his face showed plainly that, whatever he might be looking for, it was not company. Stratford could not imagine why the man should object to being seen digging for specimens of rocks, fish-worms, or anything else, unless it was on account of doing so on Sunday. He took no notice of the forbidding expression, and inquired pleasantly what there was to be found on this hillside.

"Nothing," said the man, dropping his little pick. "There's nothing at all in land like this, either inside

of it or on top of it. I live in this county, though not in this stony part, and I like to know what kind of soil we've got in one place and another. But this land ain't worth the trouble of scratching it."

"It does not appear to me in that light," said Stratford. "The pasturage is fair, and the crops in the valley lands are very good."

"Oh, yes," said the man. And as he spoke he kicked some stones and loose earth into the hole he had made. "Some of the land is good enough for crops, but there is nothing in it that is really worth anything."

"I suppose you are alluding to ores," said Stratford. "From what I have observed in sections of the country where iron is found, I should think there might be ore of that kind here."

"Humph!" said the man. "You might dig here for ten years, and you wouldn't find no iron except what was worn off your shovels or picks. Good-day to you." And, taking up his pickaxe and a stout grape-vine cane which lay on the ground, the man walked away towards the village.

Stratford continued on his way, but in a few moments he stopped and looked back. The man was carrying the little pickaxe under his coat. Stratford smiled as he went on. "I cannot imagine," he said to himself, "why he should have been so disturbed at my seeing him. He could not have been stealing anything, for there is nothing here to steal. I am afraid that after going to church this morning he intended going fishing this afternoon. He chose a very poor place, however, in which to look for bait."

Stratford was met by Mrs. Justin before he reached the house. "I saw you coming over the hill," she said; "I want to have a little talk with you before you go in." And then, as the two walked down to the bank of the creek, she said: "Your work is accomplished. The engagement between Gay Armatt and Mr. Crisman is broken."

"What!" exclaimed Stratford. And for a moment he felt a pang of contrition. He had greatly desired to see this engagement broken off, but it was a shock to be suddenly told that there had been a rupture, and that he had made it. But Mrs. Justin's next words were positively astounding.

"I would not have told you this so abruptly," she said, "if I had not intended to also say that I am very glad that everything is at an end between these two."

"You doubly amaze me!" cried Stratford. "Is it possible I have converted you?"

"Not a bit of it," promptly answered Mrs. Justin. "You were wrong, wrong, absolutely wrong in what you did. You had no more right to come between those two than you had to try to come between any other man or woman, either engaged or married. It so happens that you have done a good thing, but you deserve no credit for it. You did not know Mr. Crisman; you merely had a prejudice against him, and for no reason but this you endeavored to make a girl forswear herself."

"A strong statement," remarked Stratford.

"None too much so," continued the lady. "I have come to believe that what you did has had a most excellent result, but, for all that, it was a very wrong

thing to do; it was a crime. Now that Mr. Crisman is out of the way, everything is free and open to you, and, in the course of time, I suppose that you and Gay will be married. I have no doubt that you will both be very happy, and that neither of you could possibly have made a better match. But, for all that, you ought never to look back upon the part you have played without sorrow and repentance."

"I wish to heaven," exclaimed Stratford, "that the words I have spoken to you about Miss Armatt and myself could be believed! But I suppose this is too much to expect, and we need say no more about it. If you do not object, I should like to know how this thing happened, and what is the present state of affairs."

"As you are a party very much interested," said Mrs. Justin, "of course you ought to know all about it." And then she went on to tell him what had happened. She repeated the substance, as she had heard it, of Crisman's letter to Gay; told him what Gay had written in answer; and how she had heartily supported the girl in her resolution.

In regard to the letter which she herself had received from Crisman, and which had done more to show her the true character of the man than even what he had written to Gay, she said but little. If she had told what that letter contained she would have had good reason to fear that Stratford would have thrown the young man into Cherry Creek, or that he would have been thrown into that stream himself.

"I cannot be too glad," said Mrs. Justin, in conclusion, "that the man, before it was too late, showed us

his true character, and that he himself made it impossible for the engagement to continue. But I shall never cease to grieve that my friend chose to take the part that he has played in this affair."

"Knowing you as I do," said Stratford, "I am quite sure that I like you better for that opinion."

A meeting between the girl whose engagement of marriage had suddenly been broken off and the man who had been the cause of such fracture must naturally be an awkward one, and feeling this very strongly Stratford was not anxious for an immediate interview with Gay. If he had known what serious consequences had followed his mountain ride with Gay he would have postponed for a day or two his visit to this house. Thoughts of this awkwardness may have come into the mind of Mrs. Justin also, but if they did she allowed them no weight.

"Gay is in the house," she said, "and you may as well see her at once. You know how the matter stands, and it will not be pleasant or wise for any of us to put ourselves in stiff or constrained positions."

When Stratford took Gay by the hand and looked into her face he saw that she had had a hard blow, one that might have crushed her if, at the same time that it wounded her, it had not aroused the most emboldening sentiments of self-respect and just resentment. She was not a girl who would parade an affliction or misfortune by retiring on account of it from the society of her ordinary friends and associates. Nor was she one who would care to conceal a trouble from those who took an interest in her life and happiness. She was aware that Stratford knew

what had happened, for she had asked Mrs. Justin to tell him, and as this was the most important event of her life, not even excepting her engagement, she could not bring herself to avoid the subject with Stratford, whom she believed to be her true friend, and whose mind she knew must be occupied with it. As he probably understood that their innocent drive had brought about the catastrophe, and as she believed that no blame should attach to him, she wished him to see that she intended to visit him with no punishment, negative or positive. She did not know much and had never thought much of the way in which the world is in the habit of forming its opinions, but her good sense and experience were quite sufficient to show her what kind of opinion might easily be formed in a case like this, where the former lover had torn himself away and where the engagement-breaker continued in favor; and she was very desirous that that part of the world represented by Stratford should not have a mistaken opinion.

"You know," she said, as soon as they had taken their seats, "that Mr. Crisman and I are no longer engaged?"

"I have heard it," said Stratford.

"It was all very sudden and unexpected," she continued. "I have been greatly distressed, and Mrs. Justin also, and we are not ourselves at all. But we hope our friends will not find fault with us any more than we find fault with them."

As she said this Stratford looked steadfastly at her, but made no answer.

"I don't care to talk about this any more than I can help," she continued, "and all that we can do is to wait, and hope for the best."

"What is the best?" asked Stratford.

"The best thing that could possibly happen," said Gay, "is for us to find ourselves able to come together on our old ground, when everything can be so easily explained. Mr. Crisman knows, as every one knows, that I always have been, and am now, perfectly loyal to him."

This assertion greatly surprised Stratford, and in his heart he did not believe it.

"I do not understand you," he said. "How can you be loyal to him when you have seen fit to break your engagement to him?"

"I don't know that I can exactly explain myself," she said, "but I want to make it understood that while I am not willing to be engaged to Mr. Crisman so long as he holds the position he has taken, I have never turned aside from any of my promises; and when I find him as he was a week ago he will find me exactly what I was then. Is that plain?" And she looked with anxious inquiry at Stratford.

"Oh, yes, quite so," he said to her. But he said to himself that Crisman could never be to her the same man that he was a week ago. He saw her object: she wished to establish the fact that there had been no unfaithfulness on her part.

Here was an opportunity to do a thing which Stratford considered righteous, honorable, and kind. Here was a chance to tell this girl that she had done all that the world and her conscience should call upon her

to do; that after what had happened, the loyalty of which she spoke could be but a thing of principle without feeling; that the reasons which prompted her to break off the engagement were just as strong reasons why she should never think of it again, and that, setting arguments and words aside, she should embrace, with all the force of her nature, this opportunity of escaping a ruined life. But he said nothing of all this. He was a brave man and an able one, but he now shrank from the task of doing what he thought to be his duty. He did not believe he could give her the counsel he wished to give, and at the same time maintain the position he wished to keep.

"It will be better," he thought, "that she should find out these things for herself, and I am sure she will do it. And, besides, she has Mrs. Justin to back her."

Under the circumstances, the hours could not be expected to pass in a cheery way; and, soon after dinner, Mrs. Justin and Stratford found themselves sitting alone in a very quiet house.

"I cannot quite understand Miss Armatt's demeanor," said he. "If she is deeply grieved at the dissolution of her engagement, I should expect more evident signs of distress; and, on the other hand, if she is glad of her great deliverance, I think she would let that be seen. As it is, it would be very difficult to classify her apparent emotions."

"I believe," said Mrs. Justin, "that Gay does not thoroughly understand herself. As far as I am able to judge, her mind is now occupied in assuring her that she has always stood by her promises, and that

her steadfast fidelity gave her a right to break with a man who insisted that she should admit that she was not true to her given word."

"So long as she reasons," said Stratford, "the state of the case is perfectly satisfactory. But what surprises me more than anything else is the readiness with which you accept the situation. I should have supposed that no matter how bitter the quarrel between these young people, you would have hoped to see them reconciled and the engagement renewed."

"I am quite willing to admit," said she, "that it is not at all like me to feel the satisfaction and thankfulness that I do feel in knowing that Gay is not to marry Mr. Crisman. But this is a very unusual case, and my conscience fully justifies me." And then, in her mind, she added: "If you could have read Mr. Crisman's letter to me you would not wonder at my feelings."

## CHAPTER XXII

HERE was not at this period a more ardent match-maker in the country than Mrs. People. For a long time she had been much dissatisfied with the condition and prospects of her son John. For one thing, he was growing up to be an old bachelor, and she was opposed, on principle, to old bachelors. To be sure, it was a very fortunate thing for her that her brother Enoch belonged to this class, for otherwise it is not at all probable that she would have been at that time the mistress and director of the household; but the principle remained unchanged. Mr. People was not much more than twenty-one when he married her; and here was John, who in four short years would be thirty, still single. It was plain enough, she thought, that he was beginning to be a man of importance in his business, for otherwise old Vatoldi would never have allowed him to manage his affairs all by himself during the late disturbances. His having a vacation, too, showed that things were getting to be better with him; and what was next to be expected was an increase of salary. Taking all these matters together, it was as clear as the light of day in Mrs. People's

mind that John should lose no time in getting married.

And here was Matilda Stull; and if anybody knew of a better match for John than she was, Mrs. People would like to see that girl, be she black-haired or brown, a foreigner or a native-born American, produced at once. It was not only that Miss Stull was a very pretty girl, and very well dressed, and one with whom John was deeply in love, but there was an eminent propriety in marriage between the heir of her house and that of Stull, which loomed up in a gigantic form in the mind of Mrs. People. If John married Matilda, the farm on which he was born would, in the course of time, come into his possession; and this, from Mrs. People's point of view, was the most desirable thing that could possibly happen.

She would sit, in one hand a table-knife with its blade half ground away by repeated sharpenings, and in the other a partly peeled potato, and muse upon the happiness, the absolute felicity, which would be hers when the old farm should belong to John. To buy back this estate appeared to her a simple impossibility; to get it for nothing by means of this marriage would be a grand stroke indeed.

Many were the plans she formed while the potato waited to be peeled. She would go and live with John, for it was not likely that that city girl knew anything about housekeeping or the management of a dairy. And yet as she, Mrs. People, could not expect to live for ever, it would be necessary that her son's wife should learn how to manage his household affairs. Matilda, for thus the good woman already

thought of her prospective daughter-in-law, should do some things, and thus gradually learn the duties of her position. She could begin by washing up the tea things and feeding the chickens. In course of time she might be able to take charge of the churning, although Mrs. People very much doubted if that girl could ever produce such butter as she now set before her son.

On the other hand, it would be very hard for her to leave her brother Enoch, who was getting somewhat oldish now, and must sometimes feel a little stiff in his joints, although he never mentioned anything of the sort. She had lived a long time with her brother, and in some respects he had become as necessary to her as she was to him. And yet, how would it be possible for her to give up that desire of her life, to live once more in the house and on the farm to which Mr. People had taken her as a bride?

These conflicting feelings troubled her greatly, and she would sometimes sit and muse upon them much longer than was conducive to the regularity of the dinner hour. One day, however, a consoling thought came to her. It was possible, nay it was even more, it was very probable, that Matilda had in her composition a good deal of spice, and not only such spice as ginger, cinnamon, and cloves, but pepper, and good hot red pepper, too, if Mrs. People knew anything about the outward signs of a woman's disposition. Now, this peppery disposition might make the situation of a mother-in-law in John's home a very unpleasant one, and it might be well, therefore, that she should remain in her present very comfortable position in her brother's house. It was truly com-

forting to the mind of Mrs. People to settle this vexing question by reflecting that in all probability Matilda would be too peppery to live with; and the remainder of the potato was peeled.

It was not so easy, however, for John People himself to settle the question of Matilda Stull. He was now having opportunities for forwarding his suit which a short time before he would not have believed possible. He was living near fields through which Miss Stull walked and wandered, and where she had actually allowed him to walk and wander with her. He had no duties, and could walk and wander when he pleased. But the days of his vacation were rapidly passing, and he had done nothing decisive yet. At any moment he might expect to hear that the alterations at Vatoldi's had progressed so far that it was necessary for him to go to the city and take charge of affairs. If he could again be alone with Miss Stull, and could make up his mind to show her the state of his feelings, he believed he ought to do it. In the city he had worshiped her from afar, and had never believed that there was the slightest chance of possessing her; but here in the country, where people were ever so much more the equals of each other, he had worshiped her at a distance of a foot, or, perhaps, eighteen inches; and if a young lady was willing to walk with a young man through fields and gates so close as that, John thought that young man ought to be greatly encouraged, and might feel justified in speaking out his mind.

In regard to what old Stull might say, in case of a favorable reply from the daughter, John was not over-sanguine. It was true that now, being a part-

ner in the concern, although with a very small share of the profits, it might be possible that Mr. Stull would turn a favorable eye upon a connection which would, in a way, make the whole business a family affair. But, in spite of this encouraging thought, if John had been compelled at this time to make his proposals to the father instead of the daughter, he would have calmly resigned himself to perpetual bachelorhood. But, should he be accepted by Miss Stull, he would wait and bear to any extent.

John's mind was in this condition when, one fine morning, Miss Matilda paid a visit to the Bullripple household. To John and his mother she came like an angel with white wide-spreading wings; to old Enoch she appeared as an uppish young woman with a cattle-irritating parasol; and to Mr. Stratford, who regarded her from his window, she was an enigma. He knew who she was, but he could not imagine why she should come to that house and sit with John People under the great tree in the front yard. Miss Stull had really called upon Mrs. People, but that sagacious mother had sent John to say that she would be out in a very few minutes, and had told him that he must entertain the visitor until she came. Mrs. People was devoured by desire to know the object of Miss Stull's visit, but she restrained herself for the love of John. It was a heroic sacrifice, but she made it, and for ten minutes sifted sugar over a mass of bread dough without knowing what she did.

Miss Stull was very desirous that Mrs. People should come out; she wanted to ask her a lot of questions; but she did not betray any impatience

towards John. The young man might be useful to her, particularly in the way of making her acquainted with Mr. Stratford, if the chance should occur. Miss Matilda wished very much to know the handsome gentleman she had seen driving with Gay Armatt. She had not supposed when she came to this part of the country, that she should find such a man as that. She was therefore very gracious to John, and asked him so many questions about the present composition of the Bullripple household that the young man was obliged to say a good deal about Stratford, and could not have failed to present him had he made his appearance.

When she had waited quite as long as she could, having, in the meantime, made her dough all cake, Mrs. People came out, and John was constrained to walk away reluctantly, to give the young lady an opportunity of stating her business to his mother. He did not go very far, however, but busied himself about the wood-yard, from which point, with his face ever turned towards the object of his devotion, no matter how he might move and revolve, he held himself ready, the instant the conference should be over, to accompany Miss Stull to the gate and to go with her as far over our continent as she would permit.

What Miss Stull came to find out was the true state of things in the Justin house. Was Miss Gay engaged to the young man who was walking about in the parlor without her, or to Mr. Stratford, whom she had seen driving with her? In what business was this Mr. Crisman, and was he related to Mrs. Justin? Was Mr. Stratford rich? Was Mrs. Justin

entirely satisfied with Gay's match? All these things, and a number of other points, Miss Stull had hoped to learn from Gay; but having failed to see that young lady, and not being able to wait until her call was returned, she had made a swoop upon Mrs. People.

After some very thin talk about butter and eggs, Miss Stull found it easy to introduce the subject she had at heart. Mrs. People had also a subject at heart which she wished to introduce, and in order to get at it she rushed with haste and freedom into the subject presented by her visitor. She told Miss Stull so much, in fact, that that young lady turned pale with surprise, and then pink with delight, at being the recipient of such startling information. Mrs. People had been at Mrs. Justin's house, and as that lady was desirous that it should be generally known that Mr. Crisman was no longer engaged to Miss Armatt, she had informed Mrs. People of the fact, and that good woman had easily possessed herself of as much of the detail of the event as Mrs. Justin judged proper to give her. This information, rapidly and generously garnished from the resources of her own mind, Mrs. People laid before Miss Stull.

The interview was protracted so long that John's ingenuity was greatly taxed to keep himself busy in view of the couple under the tree. When Miss Matilda rose to go, thus interrupting an abruptly introduced maternal panegyric of the manager of Vatoldi's, her mind was filled with a pleasing consciousness that there was in this neighborhood a city gentleman, handsome and stylish and not engaged to be married.

What advantage to herself she expected to result from this Miss Stull might not have been able to state in clear and convincing terms. But it was a great satisfaction to a person of her temperament to know that the facts were as they were.

John was with her before she reached the gate, and opened it for her. Then she stopped.

"Isn't there some way, Mr. People," she said, "by which I can go home across the fields instead of walking by the side of this monotonous road?"

"Oh, yes," said John, "but there are fences in the way, and draw-bars would have to be taken down."

"And isn't there anybody," she continued, "who can take down those bars?"

To hear this question, and to see at the same time the meaning little smile on the face of the young lady who asked it, suffused John's soul with more actual joy than it had ever before known. Yes, indeed, there was somebody who could not only take down bars, but who would tear away walls, fill up ditches, and slay bulls, if necessary. John did not say this, but his manner indicated it.

As they walked across the fields, Miss Matilda's spirits were very lively, and her manner was very cordial. She had no idea of alluring this happy fly into her web, but she desired to make of him a thread-carrier, so to speak, who would take out beyond her present sphere of action those finely spun inducements by which she hoped to draw to herself the larger and brighter flutterer upon whom her eyes were fixed. John now lived with Mr. Stratford, and through him her very limited circle of acquaintance here might be

enlarged by the addition of this gentleman. She considered it her right to know every presentable man who might find himself within the limits of her social range.

Miss Stull also hoped to make Mr. Stratford comprehend through John what an exceedingly desirable thing it would be to become acquainted with her. But her methods towards this end had only the effect of causing John to feel that she was a more charming, desirable, and gracious superior being than even she herself had ever supposed it possible for her to become. On his side he was emboldened to a point of courage he had not imagined he could reach. Before they had gone three-quarters of the distance through a clover field, John determined to make his sentiments known. He would not ask her plumply if she would marry him, as if she were a mere country girl, but he would show her his glowing soul. Had she not with the sweet words and enrapturing smiles of angels deliberately set it on fire? And was it not due to her that she should see that it had kindled?

"Another set of bars!" exclaimed Miss Matilda, as they approached the fence. "Oh, dear, Mr. People, what a deal of trouble I am putting you to!"

"Trouble!" exclaimed the sturdy John. "I wish that I could take down every bar that you might meet with through your whole—"

"Way home," quickly interpolated Miss Matilda, "and that is just what I want you to do. You are so strong and seem to understand these fences so well."

"That is not the point," said John, as he seized a rail and jerked it from its sockets. "Other people might be able to take down bars—"

"Yes," interrupted Matilda; "Mr. Stratford, for instance. He has lived so much in this country that I suppose he knows all about such things."

"It isn't the being able to do it," said John, looking intently into the face of the young lady, "it is the wanting to do it."

Miss Matilda smiled upon him. "It is very good of you," she said, "to be willing to do for other people what they cannot do for themselves. Now, if I were walking here alone I could never lift those heavy rails, and would have to crawl through the fence, or to climb over it as best I might."

"If I had my way," exclaimed John, forgetting in his excitement as he walked by Miss Matilda that it was necessary to put up the bars he had taken down, "there should never be in the way of your feet a stick, a stone, a clod, a lump, not so much as a piece of gravel."

"Those things must be expected," said the young lady with demure triteness.

"Oh, no they needn't be!" cried John in quick and fervid tones. "They need never be known at all, if there is one ever ready to brush and hurl them away; to make your paths as smooth — as smooth as roses."

"Which are not smooth," said Miss Matilda, "at least not when they are used to make a path of. That reminds me that at our house there are a lot of rose bushes, and some of them have flowers on yet, but mother and I both think that they are a poor kind of rose bushes, and that if we are to come up here in the summer time we might as well have some good ones planted. Do you know the names of some good roses that would grow here? Perhaps, if you don't,

Mr. Stratford could tell you. City men are so apt to know the names of good kinds of things."

"I am a city man myself," said John in a tone somewhat different from that in which he had just spoken, "and I'll get you all the roses you will ever want."

"I don't want you to get them," said she. "I only want the names of them. And there is another thing I would like to ask you about. How do you make grass grow? Mother and I think there ought to be a great deal more of it about the house, but the farmer who lives there don't seem to understand how to plant it."

With well-plied questions concerning the adornment of their country home Miss Matilda engaged the attention of her companion until they had reached the last fence. Then she turned and held out her hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. People," she said. "There are now no other obstructions between me and the house, and I will not make you go any farther."

"There is an obstruction, Miss Stull," said John very earnestly, "an obstruction to my every joy, which —"

"Oh, yes, I know," quickly interrupted Miss Matilda; "those dreadful waiters who boycotted your place. It must be an awful obstruction, but it is bound to disappear in time, if you stand up boldly. Father has talked about it, and he says so. He is very fond of Vatoldi's, and he says we must go there again as soon as things are all right. Good-bye, Mr. People." And with one of her pretty smiles, she tripped away.

Regarding the state of affairs from John's point of view, it was quite evident that angelic beings have their disadvantages, for their beautiful wings enable them to keep just out of one's reach without feeling at all compelled to flee the company of the one who wishes to reach them.

On the other hand, Miss Matilda, in her character of web-maker, discovered that a fly who may be sent out to inveigle other insects is apt to become entangled in a very troublesome and apparently hopeless manner in the subtile threads with which he has been intrusted.

This young lady, however, troubled herself very little about John's condition. She liked to see a young man in this sort of involvement, especially when she herself had produced it, and her only regret in the present case was that the young man probably could not prove as useful as she had expected him to be. The most important object of her life at the present moment was to become acquainted with Mr. Stratford. It made her positively angry to think that she did not know him, and that she saw no way open by which she could become acquainted with him. She had called twice at the house where he lived, and accident had not favored her. She made a visit at Mrs. Justin's at a time when he was expected there, but she had not met him. She had hoped to know him through Gay Armatt, but she was now in trouble and could not be expected to do much in the way of introducing gentlemen. Miss Matilda's acute mind had discovered what sort of person was Mrs. People, and she was afraid to allow that good-hearted but exceedingly open-natured woman to know that she positively wished for the acquaintance of Mr.

Stratford. Had she done this, Miss Stull might have expected to be placed in a very undesirable position by the irrepressible frankness of Mrs. People. John had been her chief dependence, but she was now very much afraid that she would not be able to make use of him. He had become so addled that he could not understand any hints of her desires, and she was even afraid that if she should succeed in making him understand what she wanted, the numskull might actually refuse to make her acquainted with a man who might prove to be a rival.

There was nothing to be done but to depend upon herself; and as Miss Stull was quite used to this sort of dependence, she was not long in forming a plan. She must meet the man by accident. In a country place like this, where people wandered about as they pleased, this ought not to be a difficult matter; and as Mr. Stratford had probably by this time heard of her, and as he knew of course that she had heard of him, they would not meet as positive strangers, and a chance encounter might be worked up to advantage.

Miss Matilda was rather fond of sketching, and although she had but small ability as an artist, she was extremely clever in a general way, and could so arrange her slight artistic gifts that they made a very good show. The weather being now quite suitable for outdoor sketching, Miss Stull arrayed herself in a most becoming and appropriate costume, and with a sketch-book and a little camp-stool under one arm, and a large umbrella with a long, pointed handle over her right shoulder, repaired to a pleasant spot

at the foot of the hills, where some very good views could be had, and close by which she had observed, from a distance, that a sportsman occasionally passed on his way to the trout streams on the higher grounds.

The sketcher did not immediately select a spot at which to begin her work. She rambled about a good deal, and looked about a good deal, in order to see what suitable thing there was in view which might be drawn. At last she decided upon a distant view which included a path that led through the Bullripple farm towards the village.

Miss Matilda was a lucky young woman, especially when she put her own shoulder to her wheel of fortune, and she had scarcely sketched in the outlines of some rocks and gentle eminences when she saw coming towards her, among these outlines, a gentleman with a fishing-rod upon his shoulder. For some minutes she kept her eyes fixed upon her paper, and then, giving a little shrug to her shoulders and looking up at the sunlit sky, she put down her book and picked up the umbrella, which lay, closed, on the ground by her side. The pointed end of the long handle she now endeavored to thrust into the ground, but she found this a difficult performance. In one place the soil seemed very hard, in another there was long, tangled grass, and, after a jab or two, she decided that she would not like to sit there. After some deliberation, with her back to the object she intended to draw, she selected another spot, but here she found a large stone just under the surface of the ground. Having quarried on this for some moments, she

stopped and began fanning herself with her handkerchief. Such exertion was certainly very unusual with her, and she stood panting a little. The man must now be very near.

In less than a minute she heard a step, and a gentleman's voice said to her: "Allow me, miss, to plant your umbrella for you."

She turned quickly and saw, not Mr. Stratford, but Mr. Crisman. She knew him the moment she saw him, and was now truly surprised, for she had supposed that when he had ended his engagement he had also ended his visit to these parts. But her soul did not shrink with disappointment. This was a very handsome young fellow, and she would be delighted to know the ex-lover of Gay Armatt, about whom she had had so much curiosity and so much doubt.

With an ingenuous smile she accepted his offer, and the strong arm of Mr. Crisman soon fixed the handle of the umbrella in the ground as firmly as if it had been the mast of a boat.

## CHAPTER XXIII

HILE Mr. Crisman was engaged in setting up Miss Stull's sketching umbrella, that young lady looked upon him with much more interest than she regarded the work which he was doing for her. He was certainly a handsome young man, and in some respects pleased her better than did Mr. Stratford. Mr. Crisman, too, proved fully equal to the exigencies of this chance meeting. He was naturally chatty and sociable, and having become intensely bored during his companionless stay at the Cherry Bridge tavern, he was delighted at this legitimate opportunity of assisting and of talking to a very pretty young lady. He did not hesitate to ask questions or to offer suggestions in regard to the sketching business, and in her answers to these Miss Matilda managed, with much deftness, to inform him who she was and where she lived, and also to make him aware that she knew who he was.

Crisman delayed his walk and watched the sketching for some time, but at last he took up his rod. He asked her if she was coming again to this place to sketch, and she answered:

"Of course, if I do not finish this to-day I must work on it to-morrow."

When she came again on the morrow, she found Mr. Crisman there.

"I thought I would come over," he said, "and see how you were getting on with the picture." And that was all the reason or pretense he deemed it necessary to give for his presence.

Miss Stull liked this. It showed that there was no nonsense about the young man; and she greeted him very pleasantly. Although she had known him but such a very short time, and although their introduction consisted of nothing but the words she herself had spoken concerning their respective identities, Mr. Crisman possessed the present qualification which in her eyes raised him above all other young men in the world: he was there.

He staid with her a full hour, during which the drawing made little progress, but the acquaintanceship made much. John People was a simple-minded young man, while Mr. Crisman was, in many ways, extremely sharp-witted; yet Miss Matilda drew from the latter twenty times more information in regard to the persons of their mutual knowledge than she had ever been able to extract from the former. They barely mentioned Gay, for Mr. Crisman did not wish to talk about her, and Miss Stull did not think it wise to do so; but they discussed Mrs. Justin and Mr. Stratford very thoroughly, and when Mr. Crisman had finished his analysis of the character of the gentleman, Miss Stull began to perceive how very kind chance

had been in sending her the fisherman she did not expect instead of the one she had been looking for.

Mr. Crisman then proceeded to give his companion a pretty good account of himself; and as this was a subject on which it always pleased him to talk, he dwelt upon it to a considerable extent. He omitted all allusion to the original cause of his visits to this neighborhood, contenting himself with stating that he was at present staying here to fish and shoot,—that is, if he could ever find anything to shoot,—and that in a few days he was going on a yachting expedition, which would fill up the remainder of his vacation.

Mr. Crisman walked home with Miss Stull, carried her stool and her umbrella, went into the house, and was presented to her mother as a friend of Mrs. Justin. There was something extremely frank and straightforward in the conduct of Mr. Crisman. There seemed to him nothing strained or unusual in his making the acquaintance of the Stull family in this informal manner, and he showed a readiness to enter into any intimate social relations to which he might be invited. Mrs. Stull liked the absence of that stiffness which she often noticed in the society which her husband compelled her to enter, and, altogether, these three persons, each of whom was beginning to feel somewhat lonely in this country neighborhood, were very well satisfied with the new acquaintanceship.

Miss Stull sat by herself that evening, after her mother had gone to bed, and seriously pondered upon Mr. Crisman. She knew better than any one who

merely looked upon her, that not only were the months and years passing by her, but that a very good proportion of them had already passed, and that the period had arrived when she should begin to think seriously of some young man or other. As far as she could judge, Mr. Crisman fulfilled all her requirements. Personally he was entirely satisfactory, and, although she did not suppose he was rich, he had told her he was in a very good business, and she felt sure of this, for otherwise, in her opinion, the engagement of Gay Armatt would never have been allowed. In fact, this engagement was a strong recommendation to Miss Stull, it was as though his preliminary examinations had been passed, and she might therefore take him at a much more advanced stage of friendship than a person who had not thus been proved. That the engagement had been broken off did not trouble her at all. From what she had seen, she attributed it entirely to Mr. Stratford's agency, and if the girl preferred to marry that man instead of Mr. Crisman, she, Miss Matilda, was quite satisfied.

That her father would approve of Crisman she was not at all sure, but then her father disapproved of so many things it would not do to consider him always. If she should become engaged to this gentleman, she herself would see to it that the marriage took place at the proper time, and as she saw no good reason for any objection on the part of her parent, she felt quite sure that the name of J. Weatherby Stull would be signed to such checks as might be needed at the beginning of housekeeping. As to the future, Miss Matilda was

very hopeful. She was the principal child of the family, and she did not believe that her father would dare to divert permanently from her any portion of her rightful share in his property.

Having thought over this matter for nearly two hours, she determined, unless subsequently she saw some reason for changing her mind, that she would marry Mr. Crisman, and that she must lose no time in making very good use of her present exceptional opportunities.

During the next few days, several admirable methods for enjoying the scenery and the air of the country about Cherry Bridge were suggested by Mr. Crisman. He believed these to be original suggestions, not perceiving that they were produced by the adroit and quiet working of Miss Matilda's mind upon his own. There was nothing accidental about these walks and drives; Mr. Crisman came boldly to Mrs. Stull's residence, and boldly stated what he came to propose.

Miss Stull found that the remaining days of Mr. Crisman's vacation were not sufficient for the completion of her work, and she resolved to extend his stay at Cherry Bridge. For the day on which he was to join his yachting friends she proposed an excursion to a somewhat distant point of interest which she would never see unless she had some one like Mr. Crisman to accompany her. At first he declared that it was impossible for him to go on this excursion, but subsequently telegraphed to his friends requesting them to postpone for a day their start for the yacht trip. On his return from his drive with Miss Stull he

found a telegram informing him that wind, tide, and friends with limited time wait for no man, and that the yachting party had sailed.

Now, there was no reason why Mr. Crisman should not spend the rest of his vacation at Cherry Bridge; and there he spent it, and for the greater part of the time in the society of Miss Stull. On his side Mr. Crisman had no serious thoughts in connection with this very pleasant companionship. He enjoyed it, but he never expected anything to come of it. He expected to marry Gay Armatt, and would not have been surprised at any time to receive a note from Mrs. Justin stating that it would be in the interest of all parties if he should call at her house and see Gay, who was beginning to look at the matter in dispute between them in a different light from that in which she had first regarded it. He had not the slightest idea of making any conciliatory propositions himself; his nature was too obstinate for this; and he believed, besides, that anything in the way of "knuckling down" on his part would be injurious as a precedent to the matrimonial relations he proposed to establish. He was very willing that the people at the Justin house should see that he was not pining away on account of the rupture of the engagement, and that he did not even have to leave Cherry Bridge in order to find agreeable companionship.

And thus he wound his merry way among the subtile threads which Miss Matilda spread about him, sometimes breaking away in this direction or that, imagining the while that he was as free as a bird in the air, but carrying with him, all unknown to him-

self, attachments strong enough to bring him back whenever Miss Matilda wished to draw him to her. As his holidays approached their close, the lady dexterously tightened and strengthened his bonds, until one day he found himself so enwrapped and secured that he could not fly, nor run, nor walk, save at the will of his captor; he was so skillfully bound, in fact, that he could not even wish to flutter. He was engaged to be married to Miss Matilda Stull.

When he discovered this fact, it was natural that Mr. Crisman should experience some sudden emotions; one of these was an emotion of vanity: how quickly had he conquered this fine girl! He could not but think of what so lately had been,—Miss Matilda could not prevent that backward glance of his mind,—but the thoughts of what had been were overpowered by the thoughts of what existed now. All those fond feelings towards Gay which had been cooled and hardened by his jealousy and his anger Miss Matilda had warmed into strong glow and directed towards herself. One thing very potent in preventing Crisman from looking backward was the remembrance that never had Gay given that value to his utterances which had been so earnestly accorded them by Matilda. That deft spinner had actually spun her web over his heart. He loved her. He felt that she exactly suited him, and paying no thought to peculiarity of circumstances nor to hastiness of action, he was proud and happy that he had won this girl.

When all this had been settled and these two were pledged to each other for life, Miss Matilda enjoined upon her lover strict secrecy for the present. Nothing

was to be made public until the parties should meet in the city in the autumn, and then the lady would herself attend to the announcement of the engagement to her father. She felt quite sure she would be able to make him look upon the matter in a proper light; when this was done, all else would be easy. And then she allowed Mr. Crisman to depart.

Miss Stull's next move was to inform Gay Armatt, as soon as possible, of what had happened. This was not in accordance with the injunctions of secrecy which she had imposed upon Mr. Crisman, but she considered it a necessary step, and did not hesitate to make it. Until Gay had been positively assured that her lover had gone from her forever, Matilda could not feel safe.

Miss Matilda had not seen her young friend since she had met her in the buggy with Mr. Stratford. Mrs. Justin, having heard that Crisman was still in the neighborhood, said nothing about it to Gay, but endeavored to keep her, as much as possible, at home, in order that there might be no accidental and undesirable meeting. Stratford, too, thought it would be wise at this time to leave the trout streams and the woods to the supposed irate young man, and he paid a short visit to the sea-shore. About what Crisman might do or say, should he meet Stratford, the latter attempted to form no supposition; but he desired above all things to avoid scandal regarding Gay, and therefore went away.

Miss Matilda had noticed this state of affairs, and thought that matters had been managed very wisely; but now that Mr. Crisman had gone, there was no

reason why Miss Armatt should be kept any longer in seclusion and ignorance, and she determined to see her. It is true that Miss Stull did not owe the Justin house a visit, the debt being the other way. But in the country, she argued, social rules may sometimes be set aside; and happening to be driving that way, she stopped in to see Gay. It had been so long, she explained, since she had heard from her that she feared she might be ill. It was during this interview that Miss Matilda allowed Gay to suspect, and at last actually admitted to her, that she was engaged to Crisman.

"I did not intend, my dear," said Miss Stull, "to tell you this at present, but the secret has come out almost without my knowing it. This is a queer world, isn't it, dear? People pair off this way, and then they find they have made a mistake and they pair off that way. But, so long as we are all the happier for it, we ought to be very glad. And now, my dear Gay, I want you to understand that both you and Mrs. Justin owe us a visit — I'll be generous and won't count this — and if you don't pay it very soon you'll find us standing on our dignity. So now you see what you have to expect. Good-bye, and I'm very sorry Mrs. Justin is not at home."

Gay remained standing by the chair from which she had risen when her visitor took her leave. Since the actual confession, and while Miss Matilda spoke her few concluding words, Gay had not opened her lips; and now she remained struck by a heavy pain, the nature of which she did not understand. She had sent this man away, and she ought to have known

him well enough to comprehend that he would not return; why, therefore, should she feel pain at what he had done? A man who could so quickly turn his affections upon another could not be worthy of her. Why, therefore, should she now feel pain? He had treated her as no man should treat a woman; she had declined to be longer engaged to him; and he had gone to another woman. Her pride, her reason, her womanly self-respect, stood by her to comfort and support her. But, in spite of all support and comfort, she did feel pain.

## CHAPTER XXIV

JOHN PEOPLE had been summoned by Mr. Stull to the city, the alterations at Vatoldi's having reached a stage where the daily supervision of the manager was necessary. In the course of a week or so, however, John contrived to arrange matters in such a way as to give himself two days in which to visit Cherry Bridge. He informed Mr. Stull that there were some affairs he wished to attend to which the somewhat unexpected conclusion of his holiday had forced him to neglect. He did not say that this neglected business was a proposition of love to Mr. Stull's daughter, but such was the fact. John fully determined that before he left his native fields again he would boldly lay the state of his heart before Miss Stull, and find out how she regarded him.

For the first day after his arrival in the country John wandered over the fields, along the roads, and in every place where he thought it might be possible accidentally to encounter Miss Matilda. But, Mr. Crisman having recently left, that young lady had gladly given herself a rest from country strolling, and John met her not. A visit to her house naturally suggested itself to his mind, but this course was

repugnant to him. In the first place, he thought that if he went to the Stull house everybody would know what he went for, and that he could not endure. Then, again, he could not be sure of seeing Miss Matilda alone in her home, and, even if he had this good fortune, he felt that in a room or on a piazza he could not speak to her as freely and eloquently as if he were with her in the open fields.

On the second morning the pensive resignation on his brow deepened into positive trouble, for it now seemed quite probable to him that fate had decreed that he should visit Miss Matilda at her home. How he should do this, at what time he should go there, how he should demean himself, what primary reason he should give for his visit, were questions which greatly preyed upon his mind. Wandering slowly along the verdant banks of Cherry Creek, he lifted up his eyes, and beheld Miss Gay Armatt approaching him. Instantly there came into his mind a happy thought. He had met Miss Armatt several times, both at his uncle's house and at Mrs. Justin's, and, by his mother's report, he knew her to be a most kind and good young woman. "Now, why should she not help me?" was John's happy thought. "I don't mind telling her just what is the matter, and if she is as kind as they say she is, it will be easy enough for her to get Matilda to take a walk with her and so give me all the chance I want."

Having come up with the young lady, John took off his hat, bade her good-morning and stopped. Gay raised her eyes towards him as she returned his salutation, and John thought that the lady probably did

not feel very well. She was not looking her best. He made some inquiries about Mrs. Justin which had the effect of arresting Miss Armatt's steps; and then, finding that he could think of no other prefatory remarks, John perceived that it would be necessary for him to say immediately what he had to say.

"Excuse me, miss," said he, "for taking your time, but I want to ask you something, and I hope you are not in a hurry."

"I am in no hurry at all," said Gay. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

This question helped him very much. "Oh, yes, indeed," he said, "there is something you can do for me. It may seem very queer to you, Miss Armatt, for me to stand here and plump things out to you in this way; but the fact is there's no time to be lost, and what I don't do to-day can't be done at all; at least there is no likelihood of it. It will amaze you a good deal, I have no doubt, when you hear me say—and I must own that I'm amazed to hear myself say it out freely this way—that I am in love."

"In love!" exclaimed Miss Gay, and there came into her face a quick look which startled John. It seemed to him as though she might bound into the bushes and flee from his sight like a deer. Could it be possible that this young lady thought that he was about to make an amatory proposal to her?

"It is Miss Stull I'm in love with," said John, quickly, "and I'm pretty sure I shall never get a chance to let her know it if somebody don't help me, and so I thought I'd ask you, thinking if you wouldn't do it for my sake, which would be natural enough,

not knowing me very well, you might do it for my mother's, who looks on you and Mrs. Justin as her most valued neighbors."

It had been days since Gay had smiled, but she could not help smiling now. "I am always glad to do anything neighborly," said she, "but this seems very odd. Does your mother wish you to marry Miss Stull?"

"She just builds on it," answered John, "and I want you to know, Miss Armatt, that although this thing might look out of the way to an outside party, there's a good deal more reason for it than anybody except just two or three has any idea of. Miss Stull is the daughter of a rich man, and I am only the manager at Vatoldi's. But there are things that I can't tell you, but which will come out some day, that make matters a good deal more even between us than you would be likely to think. And I don't doubt, either, that old Stull will come round all right when the affair has been settled between me and his daughter, and has run on long enough to get seasoned."

"But what would you have me to do with it?" asked Gay.

"It's just this," said John: "This is the last day I have got to stay here, I don't know for how long, and I am bound to tell her before I sleep to-night. Now, I can't go to her house to tell her, Miss Armatt. Upon my word I can't! If I was to meet her mother or those two young sisters, it would drive every word out of my mind. But on the green grass and under the blue sky I could tell her all I feel and think. And that is what I want to get a chance to do. Now, if you would ask her to take a walk with you this afternoon, and I was to fall in with you, and you'd think

of some reason or other for being obliged to go home and leave us two there, then you'd be doing for me more than any woman on earth could do except Matilda herself, if she be so minded to say the word I want her to say."

Gay stood and looked upon the ground. This was all very unpleasant and embarrassing. Here was a young man whom she had heard of as a very good and deserving young man, who had been so unhappy as to fall in love with Matilda Stull. She did not thoroughly understand the relative social conditions of the two, but she knew that one was a rich young lady, and the other was the son of Mrs. People. These situations in life appeared quite incongruous to Gay, but she only thought of them in connection with her wonder that this love of the young man had ever been suffered to grow up. In regard to the present and important phase of the question, there was but one thing to think of, and that was that Miss Stull was already engaged.

And yet Gay could not say this to John People. She had not told Mrs. Justin, nor Mr. Stratford, nor any one, for it was not only the pledge of secrecy which prevented her from telling of this engagement. Had she been free to speak, she could not have told any one that the man who but a few weeks before had been her lover had now promised to marry another woman.

"Now, you see, Miss Armatt," said John, "it is a very simple thing I ask of you. Won't you be kind enough to do it for me?"

There was that in the tone and voice and look of John People which was so honest, and withal so ten-

der, that it touched Gay's heart. There could be no doubt that this man was truly in love. Would her conscience permit her to let him hurl himself against that cold steel wall which he adored, and in which he fancied he saw a reflection of himself?

"It is a very hard thing," thought Gay, "for me to have to do this. It is just the same as if I were refusing him for Matilda Stull. People ought to attend to these things for themselves. And yet I know, and he doesn't know. Ought I to let him go on in this blind way? It would be too cruel."

"Mr. People," she said, "if I were you, I think I would not carry this matter any further. Indeed, I would not."

John looked at her very steadily, and a little of the ruddiness seemed to fade out of his face. "Why do you say that, Miss Armatt? Have you any reason to think that I ought not to speak to her?"

"Yes," said Gay, "and a very good reason. I can't explain it to you, but —"

"Now, Miss Armatt," interrupted John, with eager haste, "I understand what you mean, but you are not right. You don't know Miss Stull as I do. And even if things were as unequal between us as they look to be,— and upon my word, Miss Armatt, I tell you they are not,— it wouldn't make any difference to her. I've walked with her, and I've talked with her, and if you could have heard her, you would know what I know. And besides," he added, throwing into his voice a tone of strong entreaty, "I want to have this settled. I can't live this way any longer. Even if she didn't mean all she seemed to mean, and if she didn't care about what I said, I want to know it.

Perhaps if she thinks I am too forward, I might be able to make her understand that there have been changes. Things are not exactly as they used to be. You see, Miss Armatt, all I ask is, just help me to see her; only let me talk to her."

"Mr. People," said Gay, looking at him very earnestly, and with a certain gentleness in her voice, "I really would not try to see Miss Stull. It will be much better for you to give it all up at once. I know that you can never be anything to her."

"You know!" cried John. "Do you really mean that?"

"I mean it," she said; "most earnestly and truly I mean it. You ask me to help you, and there is no way in the world in which I can help you so well as to keep you from making one step more."

"Miss Armatt," said John, his voice a little broken, "do you know anything which gives you the right to say that?"

"Yes, I do," answered Gay, "and it would be wicked and cruel in me not to say so. I am very, very sorry for you, Mr. People, but it would be of no use at all for you to go to Matilda Stull, and you ought not to do it."

John stood looking upon the ground; then he raised his eyes. "No use at all?" he said.

"Not one bit," answered Gay. "I positively know it."

John's breast heaved, and he turned to one side. Then he held out his hand. "I am much obliged to you, Miss Armatt," he said. And he went away.

Gay stood and looked after him. Never again could that young man walk under blue skies and over green fields with the woman he loved. If he

had ever done anything of the kind, all that was left to him now was to look back upon it.

And she, herself? She must look back too.

She walked on a few steps, and then she sat upon a stone. "It is too hard," she said to herself, "that this should be brought to me from both sides. It is too much!" And, putting her face into her hands, there burst from her the first tears she had shed since she became a woman.

## CHAPTER XXV

R. ZENAS TURBY had not been very successful in his search for iron on the farm of Enoch Bullripple. He had found strong evidences of the existence of the ore on the lands of Mr. Stull, but the deposits did not seem to extend themselves in the direction of the Bullripple hills and fields. When Mr. Turby returned to his country town, after the Sunday on which Mr. Stratford had seen him making his investigations, he wrote Mr. Stull a report of the result of his searches, and it was very plain to him from the reply which he received that this report was not at all satisfactory to his employer.

Mr. Stull was a man of business as well as a man of feeling, and while he would have been very glad to see Enoch Bullripple ousted from his farm and to possess himself of the same, he did not care to go into this transaction solely from motives of revenge; he wished also to derive some direct advantage from it.

The question of the tenure of the lands was a very simple one. Mrs. People's husband and Enoch had each bought their farms from the heir of an old farmer who had been one of the earliest settlers of

Cherry Bridge. The sale had been perfectly satisfactory to all parties, and Enoch had paid in full for his farm, but Mr. People had never been able to do this, and therefore it was that Mr. Stull, desiring a country place in a picturesque region for his growing family, had found it possible to buy up the mortgage against said farm, to oust the People family, and to possess himself of the property. During the last few years, however, it had become known that the old farmer before mentioned had had other heirs besides the one who sold the farms to Mr. People and Enoch Bullripple; but as these heirs lived in the West, and probably did not know that their relative had owned this mountain property, and, if they did, were not likely to enter into litigation for their share of the comparatively small value of the farms, the sandy foundations of this real estate transaction were considered to be quite sound enough for ordinary intents and purposes.

Now, Mr. Stull looked upon the matter in this light: If his land and that of old Enoch were rich in iron ore, he wished to possess himself of it all on a secure tenure, and would, therefore, gladly take measures to have the distant heirs come forward and prove their claims, and cause the property to be put upon the market, whereupon he would buy it, willingly sacrificing what he had paid before for the sake of the larger gain. But if this should prove to possess no mineral wealth, its agricultural value was not sufficient to make him desirous of buying it again, and he was perfectly willing to trust his good fortune and his lawyer to hold possession of it. Nor

was the fact that Mr. Turby had found iron on his farm sufficient to induce Mr. Stull to take the measures he had meditated. If he could not have Enoch Bullripple's land, and perhaps some adjoining properties, so as to form a large tract which would be worth working, Mr. Stull did not care to go into the iron ore business. Therefore it was that Turby's report was not satisfactory to him.

Now, the energetic Zenas had hoped for himself a very fair profit from this piece of business, and he was loath, therefore, to see it dropped. Perceiving more plainly than he had perceived it before that he ought to find iron ore on the land of Enoch Bullripple, he determined to do it, if the thing were possible. He thereupon made another visit to Cherry Bridge; and as Enoch and his sister were sitting down to dinner on a pleasant summer day, they both saw the tax collector and amateur professor of applied geology busy at work near the top of a little hill not a half mile from their window.

"Confound that sneak of a Zenas Turby!" exclaimed Enoch, rising to his feet. "I've a mind to take my gun and blow off the top of his head! He knows I've told him not to come scratchin' here at my land. He thinks he's so far away we can't see him."

Mrs. People was not in a happy humor. It had not been very long since she had been told by her son John, just before he had left her for the city, that the brilliant hopes she built upon the basis of a Stull-People combination had come to naught, and must be allowed to vanish utterly. It was very hard for her to bear a blow like this, and her customary

expression of outreaching good-nature had changed to one of mild ill-humor. The vision of herself as the central figure in her old homestead, or at least declining to assume that position only from the fact that Matilda Stull might prove a disagreeable daughter to live with, had been a very dear one to her. She had seen it by day and by night; while making pies, at the working of butter, and even during the intricate processes of the preserving of plums and the concoction of currant-jelly. To give it up was like a spoonful of brine in a custard-pudding.

The worst thing about Mrs. People's ill-humors, which were of very rare occurrence, was the fact that no one could tell in what direction they would vent themselves. Like a howitzer strapped to the back of a mule, they were as likely to be directed against friend as foe.

"Now, what in the name of common sense, Enoch," said she, "are you workin' yourself up into such tantrums for? If Zenas Turby finds iron on your land, how's that goin' to hurt you? What with the rains one year, and the drought the next, and the chicken-pip reg'lar every spring, there ain't much else you get off it. If he finds ore, it's yours and not his. So what's the use of jumpin' up that way and pullin' the table-cloth all crooked?"

Enoch sat down, but he kept his eye fixed on Zenas, who was now engaged in filling up a hole he had made in the ground. When this had been done, he gathered some large flat stones and made a little pile of them near the place where he had dug his hole. "Markin' the spot, eh?" said Enoch to himself, for

he thought it not wise to make any further remarks on it to his sister. "What is he doin' that for?"

There now came into the shrewd old mind of Mr. Bullripple, as he watched the intruder disappear across the fields, a suspicion that those people out West, who it had been rumored ought to have had a voice in the giving of a title to this land, might have commissioned Zenas Turby to examine into the value of the property and find out whether or not it was worth fighting for. This supposition disturbed the mind of Enoch, for although he had declined to believe in the alleged claims of the far-away heirs, and had very strong faith in the virtue of possession when it related to land that had been bought and paid for, it was natural enough that he should be troubled by any actual evidence that an attack might be made upon the validity of his land deeds.

Even if Turby were merely searching for ore in the interests of some one who desired to open mines on his land, Enoch was dissatisfied. He had been told years before, by a scientific friend of Mr. Stratford, that there was no probability that his land contained iron, and he would have had no faith in the value of any propositions which might be made to him on the subject.

When he had finished his dinner, Enoch put on his hat and went out.

"Now, if you meet Mr. Turby," said Mrs. People, "don't you bother him. If he can find anythin' that's worth havin' on this place, I'm sure I'd like to see him do it! I always told you, Enoch, that you took the poorest farm, and let Mr. People have the one

that was ever so much better. Of course I was glad enough of that at the time, but if you'd been a little sharper, you'd got the best farm, and you and me would have been livin' on it now, and that Stull man would have had this dried-up place. Mr. People was very sharp."

Enoch said nothing about his having preferred a farm for which he felt he could pay, leaving to his brother-in-law the larger one for which it would be very difficult to pay, and went out over the fields. He walked straight to the spot where Turby had been digging, and stood and looked at it, and with a sharp-pointed stone he began to turn up the loose soil. When he had scratched out the most of it, he looked into the bottom of the hole.

"It may be," thought he, "that that rocky stuff has got some iron in it; and, at any rate, I'm dead sure that old Zenas is goin' to bring somebody here to look at it."

Mr. Bullripple, in a reflective mood, stood kicking the loose earth and stones back into the hole. Then he suddenly pulled his soft felt hat down over his right brow. A broad grin illumined his countenance, and with rapid steps he started for home. In about half an hour he returned, pushing before him a heavily loaded wheelbarrow. When he reached the little pile of stones, he took from the barrow a spade and a pickaxe, and began vigorously to deepen the hole which Mr. Turby had made, throwing most of the excavated soil into the wheelbarrow, which had been emptied of all its contents. When the hole was deep enough, he nearly filled it with said contents, and then,

throwing in some soil, he smoothed up the place and made it look very much as it had done when Turby left it. Then Enoch took away his tools and his barrow, dumping the soil the latter contained into a hollow at some little distance, and returned to his house.

All that afternoon, no matter what else he might be doing, Mr. Bullripple kept an eye on the spot where he and Mr. Turby had been working. Nobody came to it, however, and the next morning he found himself obliged to go to the village. He left the spot in question in charge of his sister, telling her that if, during his absence, she saw anybody go there to dig, she must put on her bonnet and hurry over there to see what they got out of the ground. As Mrs. People always possessed a lively curiosity to know what people might get out of the ground, or out of anything else, she willingly accepted this charge.

When Mr. Bullripple arrived at the Cherry Bridge tavern, he found there Zenas Turby, who was ostensibly visiting the village for the purpose of collecting some debts.

"How d'ye do, Turby?" said Enoch. "Still keepin' up your right, I see, to the name of 'Old Scratch!'"

"What do you mean?" asked the other.

"I mean," said Enoch, "that you're still goin' round, scratchin' up people's land to see what's under the grass. I do sometimes think that the groundhogs must owe you somethin' and that you're tryin' to levy on 'em."

As usual there were several village loungers in the room, and among these it was quite natural that Enoch's remark should raise a laugh.

"Humph!" growled Turby. "When I get anybody levied on either for not payin' what he owes, or else for holdin' what he don't own, it isn't goin' to be a ground-hog, mind, I tell you."

"Now, look here, Zenas," said Mr. Bullripple, seating himself astride of a chair with his arms over its back, "it does make me laugh to see you come huntin' and grubbin' about my land to find iron ore when everybody knows there isn't any there."

"Confound your land!" said Turby. "What do I care about it?" And taking his big cane in his hand, he rose to depart.

"Care about it!" shouted Enoch in a tone which arrested the steps of the collector. "I should say you cared lots about it. Perhaps you will hardly believe me," he said, turning round to the company, "but it's as true as preachin' that I saw Zenas Turby yesterday diggin' away in one of my fields as if he was after a gold mine. Now, I believe it's nothin' but contrariness that makes him do that. I've told him, over and over again, that there ain't no ore there, and jus' to prove that I am wrong, he's tryin' to find it; but he's found himself to be the worst mistook man in this county, in spite of all he says he knows about mines and ores, and that sort or thing."

Mr. Turby's rugged face was turned severely upon Enoch. "Mistook, eh?" he growled. "That's all you know about it! I don't mind sayin' that I make it my business to know what sort of land there is in every part of this county, and I don't make no mistakes nuther. And, to prove it, I say there is iron on Enoch Bullripple's place. I don't say there's enough

of it to make the land worth anything, which everybody knows it isn't now; but it's there, for all that."

Enoch laughed derisively. "It is easy enough to say that," he cried, "but you couldn't show me a piece of ore on my land as big as a hickory-nut. I dare you to do it."

Enoch's contemptuous tone was very irritating to Mr. Turby.

"Now, to show you and the rest of these people what sort of fool you are, Enoch Bullripple, I'll jus' take you over to your own farm and let you see the ore that you haven't got sense enough to know is there till I come to p'int it out to you. And anybody can come along that chooses."

"All right!" said Enoch. "If you want a chance to show what you don't know, I'm ready to give it to you." And he went out to his horse.

Mr. Turby's sulky was tied near by, and the tavern loungers did not mind a walk of a mile or so to find out which was the fool, Zenas Turby or Enoch Bullripple. Enoch called upon Pat, the stable-man, to come along and bring a spade and pickaxe, for he did not wish, he said, that Mr. Turby should fail in his search because his own little pick would not grub deep enough.

The party proceeded by the road for a considerable distance, and then they tied their horses to a fence and went over the fields until they came to the spot where Zenas had been digging.

"There's iron ore here," he said, "for I found it myself just about this spot."

"You have a great eye for spots," said Enoch, assuming to take no notice of the little pile of stones, "and you can dig here jus' as well as anywhere, for you won't find nothin'."

"We'll see about that," said Zenas. "You can begin there," turning to Pat and pointing to the place where the soil had been disturbed.

Pat made a blow with his pick, and scattered some loose dirt and stones; then again he brought down the heavy implement, and its point penetrated to some distance into the earth, where it appeared to fasten itself. The stout Pat gave a dexterous double-twist and jerked it out, and lo! upon its point there hung an old and somewhat rusty flat-iron!

Everybody started with surprise, and then there was a yell of laughter.

"Upon my word!" shouted Enoch, "my sile has got iron in it, after all! Go ahead, Pat!"

The laughing Irishman went ahead with right good will, and in a few moments he brought out of the hole a piece of old chain, two or three horseshoes, and several pieces of broken stove-pipe.

Everybody was in a roar of delight except Mr. Turby, who stood purple-red and furious. "I'll pay you for this, you Bullripple!" he said, shaking his fist at his old enemy. And without another word, he marched away.

If his anger had not dulled his usually sharp wits, he might have stopped long enough to show that really there was iron in the soil. But the boisterous derision of the little party made him forget everything else.

"Good-bye, Zenas," shouted Enoch after him. "I'll give in that you are right and I am wrong. Nobody can say now that there ain't no iron on my land, for you've come here yourself and p'inted it out."

And a fresh burst of laughter followed the retreating Turby.

Enoch now related with much glee how he had planned out and created this novel mineral deposit; how he had gone to the village in the hope that he could find Turby and stir him up to come and get himself caught in this trap. And then the jubilant little company departed, to tell to whomsoever they could find to listen this capital joke upon an old curmudgeon whom nobody liked.

"Ef iver he ses oiurn ore agin," said the jovial Pat, "it's shure there'll be somebody to fetch him a bit of a sthove-poipe, and axin him ef that's the sort he's afther."

The first person to whom Enoch had the chance to tell the tale was his sister, whom he met as he was leading his horse homeward across the fields. Mrs. People had seen the men on the hill, and, true to her promise and her curiosity, had hurried off to find out what they were going to dig up. Rapid progress was impossible for her, and she did not arrive in time; but Enoch's story so warmed her with delight that the clouds and fogs that had come up on account of the Matilda Stull disappointment melted and vanished away, and the disposition of Mrs. People again dwelt under its naturally sunny sky.

Mr. Turby drove directly home to his county town, and on the way he turned over this matter in

his mind. He had made a blunder in allowing to slip from him in his anger the admission that he had found iron ore on the Bullripple farm. But, after all, the case was not as bad as it might be. The result of the joke would be to cause those giggling fools to believe that there was no ore there, and that suited him exactly. But he would make Enoch Bullripple pay for his trick; and the first stroke in this present labor of hate would be to write to Mr. Stull and inform him that, having made renewed investigations on the Bullripple farm, he had found large deposits of iron.

"If that stirs him up," said Mr. Turby to himself, "to start out fresh ag'in after that land, he's the man to git it. And when he's got it, it'll be my turn to do the grinnin'!"

## CHAPTER XXVI

HEN Horace Stratford returned from the sea-shore to his summer home on the Bullripple farm, his mind was in a state of uncertainty which was not usual to it. This was occasioned by doubts in regard to the proper conduct of his relations with Gay Armatt. Everything was now very different from what it had been. In his former intercourse with her the two had been separated by a barrier which protected them both, and, while it separated them, actually gave them a sense of freedom in their social relations which they could not have felt had they not always been able to see that the engagement with Crisman stood between them. That barrier no longer existed, and Stratford could not but ask himself if Gay and he could continue to move in close parallel lines without a bar between them. Would not their lines be ever liable to meet? Would not the world wonder if they did not meet? Would not Gay herself wonder?

But he was not at all willing to create an effectual barrier of space by removing his line to a great and safe distance from that of Gay. He knew nothing of the new bonds into which Crisman had entered, and

he had not that faith in the absolute sundering of the man's relations with Gay which he would have liked to have. If the two should come together,— the one a little lonely, still loyal as far as principle could go, and always apt to be tender-hearted, and the other repentant of his brutal folly and with renewed desire to possess that treasure on which he had turned his back,— Stratford would be very fearful of the consequences. And if those consequences should be a re-engagement, the last condition of Gay would be far worse than the first, for she would take a man whom she knew to be unworthy of her, and this step would give his unworthiness peculiar advantages in their future life.

Looking at the matter in this light, it was plain enough that Gay should not be left to feel the want of that companionship to which she had been accustomed during this bright summer, and to miss that support and stimulation which Stratford had given her almost ever since he had known her, and which, in his opinion, had been productive of such good results. He could not forget that the devil finds some mischief still for idle minds as well as for idle hands, and he wished that Gay's mind should be worthily and industriously engaged with something which should not be Crisman.

If Stratford had been asked why he had not before considered the possibility of this dilemma, he would have answered that the present state of affairs came about much more suddenly than he had expected. He had believed that Gay would gradually be led to see her false position, and as the problems of the case

formed themselves, the solutions would also appear. But now there was no time for the natural growth of solutions. They must be artificially constructed, and Stratford felt the task a very difficult one. If he could have been taken into the confidence of Miss Matilda Stull, his mind would have been very much easier.

In this mental condition Stratford went to visit Mrs. Justin, and when he had been ten minutes in the company of Gay, all his doubts and uncertainties regarding his proper course of action were dissipated. This was in consequence, first, of the girl's demeanor, for she met him with the same frank and earnest friendliness which she had shown to him on the last day they had met. "She has not changed in regard to me," he said to himself, "and why should I change in regard to her?"

In the second place, Stratford was affected by Gay's appearance. There was something of sadness about her, and while he could not determine exactly how this sadness showed itself, he could see that it was there. She had lost none of her bloom, her freshness, or her beauty; but, apart from her friendliness and her delight in meeting him again, she was not exactly the same Gay.

"Poor child!" thought Stratford, "she has been touched more deeply than I supposed, and I must do what I can for her."

Therefore it was that the next morning the old readings were recommenced on the piazza; and therefore it was that on many days afterwards Stratford staid to luncheon, and often to dinner; and that the

beautiful country freely yielded its pleasures, sometimes to the three of them, and sometimes to the two. Stratford was very anxious to see the full joyousness of Gay's nature assert itself. He thought it due to her character that there should disappear from her demeanor as soon as possible all vestige of regret for a step which her own good sense and high honor had impelled her to take. He knew nothing of that second blow, that revelation of the fact that not only had she no lover, but that she never had had a lover. To be affianced now to Matilda Stull, Crisman must always have been false to her. So thought Gay Armatt.

The full joyousness did not appear, but Gay entered with great earnestness and hearty good will into everything that Stratford proposed, whether it were study or pleasure. She had not known before how much restraint she had been used to put upon herself in her intercourse with this friend. She now knew that not only had there been a good deal of restraint, but that it had all disappeared. As the days passed on, she became Stratford's disciple. No one ever more thoroughly believed in a master than she believed in him.

With the exceedingly friendly intimacy which resulted from all this, Mrs. Justin did not interfere. She had thought Stratford's course wrong in the beginning, and she thought it wrong now. She did not believe it was right in a man who had just broken off a match to step forward so promptly to turn the rupture to his own advantage. And yet she could not deny to herself that no greater good could have happened to Gay than her delivery from Crisman. And

neither could she believe that any possible good could now come to the girl which would be greater than a marriage with Stratford. She had opposed that which she believed to be evil which was being done that good might come of it, and the good had come in spite of her opposition. She now considered that she had done enough. She would oppose no more.

It was on a warm morning, well forward in August, that Stratford was very much surprised by a visit from Arthur Thorne. It was such an unusual, in fact such an unheard-of thing for Thorne to make a visit without either being invited or announcing his intention, that Stratford did not attempt to conceal his astonishment when he met his friend.

"I thought you would be somewhat amazed," said Mr. Thorne, as he took a seat on the Bullripple porch and fanned himself with his straw hat, "but I didn't suppose your emotion would really injure your constitution, and as I wanted to come, I came. I'll tell you all about it as soon as I am a little cooled off."

In a few minutes Mr. Thorne became more comfortable, and then he settled himself back in the big wooden arm-chair, and asked his friend for a pipe.

"A pipe!" exclaimed Stratford. "You don't mean to say you smoke!"

"Yes, I do," said Thorne. "Why shouldn't I smoke? In fact, I like to smoke. The family don't object to it out here, do they?"

"Of course nobody objects to it," said the other, "but I must admit that I am surprised to find that you want to smoke, and especially a pipe."

Stratford brought the pipe and one for himself, and the two friends composed themselves for a chat.

"I can talk so much better when I am smoking," said Arthur.

"That is a new thing, isn't it?" remarked Stratford.

"Rather newish," said his friend. "And indeed there seems to be a tendency towards newishness with me. Now, I am well aware that it isn't proper for me to come here without knowing whether you want me or not, or even writing to let you know I intended to do it. But I took it into my head to come, and here I am. If it is not entirely convenient for you to have me, I can go to the tavern in the village. I dare say it is a very good tavern."

"Convenient!" said Stratford. "Of course it is entirely convenient. Here is the room which you had before, all ready for you."

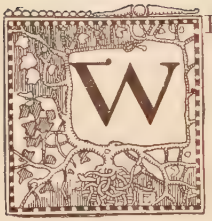
"That is very good of you," said Thorne, "and I don't mind in the least telling you why I came down here, or up, whichever it is. It is all on account of Miss Armatt. I never had anything take possession of me as that girl has! I have tried to be proper about it, but it's of no use. In fact, I am tired of being proper. It doesn't pay. Sometimes it makes me sick to see everything straight and proper about me, for I am just the other way myself. I have worked hard at one thing and I have worked hard at another; that doesn't help me at all; I am thinking of her all the time.—Then I sat down, and said to myself: 'This trying to do the right thing is all stuff and nonsense. There is Stratford; he doesn't trouble

himself about anything of the sort, and he is happy. If he likes a girl, he makes himself agreeable to her, he spends his time with her, and he carries out his theories. It doesn't make any difference to him that she is engaged to be married to some one else, and why should it make a difference to me? I cannot expect to make myself agreeable to her, nor to spend my time with her, and I have no theories to carry out, but I can go there and look at her again.' And that I determined to do. Now, I know very well that even this is not right; that it is unjust to myself, and unjust to the man who is engaged to Miss Armatt. But, as I said before, I am tired of doing right. That sort of thing doesn't help me any. It simply gives me the worst of everything and puts me in the background; and I have made up my mind to drop it. Of course this is all very astonishing to you, Stratford, but I determined to be quite frank and open with you, and let you see everything just as it stands."

Stratford drew a long breath. "I wish to be perfectly frank and open with *you*," he said, "and therefore deem it my duty to tell you that Miss Armatt is not under promise to marry any one. Her engagement with Mr. Crisman has been broken off."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Thorne, springing up so suddenly that his chair fell backward on the porch.

## CHAPTER XXVII



HEN Arthur Thorne jumped up so suddenly on hearing the surprising announcement that Gay Armatt was not engaged to be married to any one, the noise made by his falling chair brought Mrs. People hurrying to the porch.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Thorne?" she exclaimed. "I hadn't the least notion in the world that you was here, and if you've been trying to tilt back in that chair I wonder you didn't break your neck! The hind legs is too straight up and down. I'm very glad to see you here again, though Mr. Stratford never told me a word of your comin', and I'll have your room ready for you in ten minutes."

To these remarks Mr. Thorne made no reply, but stood looking at Stratford. He was a man notable for his courteous manners to every one, but his mind was so completely occupied with what he had just heard that he scarcely noticed that Mrs. People was talking to him.

After a very searching gaze directed upon Mr. Thorne, that good woman stepped inside the front door, and beckoned to Stratford. The latter excused himself to his visitor, who was still standing in blank

staring astonishment, and went into the house. He was very glad to do so, for conversation with Thorne in his present state of mind, and with Mrs. People near by, was not to be desired.

Mrs. People conducted Stratford into an inner room, and closed the door. "If I was you," she said, quickly, "I'd take him upstairs jus' as soon as I've put on the clean sheets and pillow-cases, and I'd have him in bed before his chill comes on. Of course he brought it with him, for there's nothin' of the kind here, but this mountain air often does bring 'em out dreadful sudden, when the system is full of malariousness. It won't do to give him any quinine till he's got through with his fever, and I'm no hand to be recommendin' mustard-plasters and hot foot-soaks before there's any real reason for usin' 'em; but what I'll make for him, and bring it up to his room almost as soon as you've got him tucked in comfortable, is a big bowl of hot quassia tea. Mr. People, when he was livin', used to say that there was nothin' that suited more of the different chronic things that he was afflicted with than quassia tea. It's bein' such a good honest bitter is one of its strong p'ints, and Mr. People has told me often, when he took it for some of his more triflin' complaints, that he forgot he had anythin' the matter with him but a taste in his mouth. So I'll put the quassia on to draw, and then I'll take Maria right up to his room, and we'll get it ready."

Stratford did not interrupt Mrs. People in these remarks, for they amused him, and he was very willing, moreover, not only to give his friend time to

somewhat tranquilize his mind, but to get an opportunity to arrange his own ideas. But he now told Mrs. People that Mr. Thorne needed no medicine whatever, but was merely a little disturbed in his mind by something that had occurred.

"Disturbed! I should think!" said the kind-hearted woman. "And if he's lost all his money I hope you'll tell him, Mr. Stratford, that as long as he's a friend of yours there's always a room for him here, and the board may run on for a year, if he likes."

Stratford thanked her, and went out to meet his friend. "Let us go under that big tree," he said, "where we can talk more at our ease."

When they reached the big tree Stratford took a seat, motioning his friend to another; but Thorne remained standing. "Do you mean to tell me," said he, "that Miss Armatt is perfectly free and disengaged?"

"Yes," said Stratford, "that is what I said."

"Well, then," asked Thorne, "what reason is there why I should not pay my addresses to her?"

"There are two very strong reasons," said Stratford. "One is that it would be heartless in any one to address a girl whose sensitive nature has just received a very severe shock in the breaking off of an engagement; and in the second place it would be very bad policy both as regards Miss Armatt and yourself. But from what I know it is not at all certain that Crisman has lost all his chances. Were he to repent and return, and there is no reason why he should not do this if he is not an absolute ass, I should be very much afraid of the result. With a

girl of Miss Armatt's principles it would be much easier to renew a former engagement than to make a fresh one. Any attempt now to enlist her affections would throw her mind into such disturbance that, were that man to return, he would find her troubled mental condition greatly to his advantage."

Thorne snapped his fingers impatiently. "For these reasons," he said, "I suppose you are now keeping away from her."

"The reasons have nothing to do with me," said Stratford. "As you very well know, I have no intention of addressing her, and my object is, as it has been, to bring her mind into such a condition that the element of regard for Crisman must necessarily be eliminated from it."

Thorne stood for some moments steadily gazing at his friend. Then he said: "Stratford, that may all be very well, but it seems to me that I am the one who should undertake the task of encouraging and helping this young girl in the way you speak of. I have an object in it, which you say you have not. I have heard you speak of carrying her over the gap which the success of your plans might create. Very well, then, let me carry her over. I shall not drop her on the other side, as you say you intend to do."

"My dear boy," said Stratford, with a smile, "you could not do it. You do not know her, and she does not know you. In many respects you are strangers to each other, and it will be utterly impossible for her to have that confidence in you, and I may say that regard for you, which is absolutely necessary in this case. It would be impertinent, and utterly unjusti-

fiable, for me or any one else to attempt to arrange Miss Armatt's future for her. I have simply endeavored to avert from her an evil which she did not understand, and I hope I have succeeded. With anything further than that I have nothing to do; but I will say, as I have said before, that it would delight me very much to see her married to such a man as you. And, by the way, I wish you would sit down."

Mr. Thorne did not move. "Stratford," said he, "you are very difficult to understand, and I don't pretend to be able to do it; but you have said two things with which I agree. One is that it would be wrong to address the lady openly at this time; and the other is that my comparatively slight acquaintance with her places me under a very great disadvantage. This I shall endeavor as soon as possible to remove. I shall try to know her, and let her know me. I came into these parts solely to see her; I shall remain for the purpose of becoming thoroughly acquainted with her; that is all; and I shall do no more until the proper time comes. It is a good first step, and I am glad you suggested it to me."

Stratford did not immediately reply, but presently he said, "Then I am to have you here with me?"

"No," said Thorne, "that would not be well. You are very kind, and so is that good woman. But I shall not be satisfied to stay here. I shall wish to feel perfectly independent. I shall go to the hotel in the village. There is one there, I believe?"

"There is no hotel," said Stratford; "there is nothing but a tavern, and I am sure it will not suit you at all. It will be much better for you to stay here."

"You are very good indeed," said Thorne, "but I prefer the tavern. I left some baggage at the station, and I will have it sent there. Good-bye."

Stratford rose and took his extended hand. "I suppose I shall see you again," said he.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Thorne. "No doubt we shall meet often." And he strode away.

"He don't believe in me," thought Stratford. "And he is wonderfully changed."

The next day Mr. Thorne made a formal call at Mrs. Justin's house. He saw both the ladies, and although there was no trace of the fact in their manner, neither of them was glad to see him. Gay thought that he would prove an interruption to the course of reading that she and Mr. Stratford were carrying on together; and Mrs. Justin could not but imagine, remembering Mr. Thorne's letter to her, that in some way he had heard of the broken engagement, and, considering the field open, had come to pay his addresses to Gay. Of this she did not at all approve, for, after what had happened, there was only one man she favored as a husband for her young friend. She would not have Gay tossed about like a shuttlecock from this man to that.

Mrs. Justin was not long left to conjecture upon this subject. Mr. Thorne took an early opportunity of speaking to her privately. He informed her that his feelings and aspirations in regard to Miss Armatt remained the same as when he had previously communicated with her by letter; and that having recently heard that the young lady's affections were now disengaged, he desired, at the proper time and

season, to endeavor to win those affections; but that he was very well aware that any such attempt would be useless and reprehensible at present. All he now wished was to obtain Mrs. Justin's consent, as the young lady's friend and guardian, to visit her and make her as thoroughly acquainted with him as possible. Mrs. Justin might feel assured that more than this he would not do during his present stay in the vicinity.

To all this Mrs. Justin could make no outward objection, although she did not like it at all. She knew Mr. Thorne to be a perfectly honorable man, and therefore felt justified in inviting him to visit her frequently during his stay; but she gave him no encouragement whatever, stating that she did not feel that she had any right to say or do anything which could be construed to affect in any way Miss Armatt's prospects of the kind alluded to.

"I wished to make my object and intentions plain to you, madam," said Thorne, "without leaving anything to conjecture; and if, after hearing me, you permit me to visit your house, it is all I ask."

"He is too horribly correct," thought Mrs. Justin, when Thorne had gone, "and in this case nothing could be worse than that, for it gives me no opportunity to oppose him."

When Mrs. Justin next saw Stratford she expressed her impatience with this visit of his friend Thorne. "He is a thoroughly good fellow," she said, "but I do not want him to interfere with you."

"Mrs. Justin," said Stratford, his brows contracting as he spoke, "am I never to expect to be believed

by you regarding my intentions towards Gay Armatt?"

"I do not wish to believe what you have said to me about them," she answered, "and I earnestly hope that you will say nothing more of the kind. You ought to marry Gay Armatt for your own sake, for everybody's sake, but above all for her sake. It would be cruel, positively cruel, for you to drop her now."

"I do not wish to say anything," said Stratford, "which might give rise to unpleasant feelings between us, but I will merely reassert, entirely for my own satisfaction, that I do not intend to marry Gay Armatt."

"I should be grieved indeed," said Mrs. Justin, "if any unpleasant feelings should arise between us, but I will say, entirely for my own satisfaction, that you cannot help marrying her."

And with that she left him.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

HEN the alterations at Vatoldi's had reached that stage at which John People could personally carry out the manifold directions and plans of Mr. Stull, the work went on rapidly, and it was not long before the famous restaurant, greatly enlarged, and very much improved, opened its doors again to the public. The boycotting campaign having come to an end, it was very easy to secure a corps of trained waiters, nearly all the old ones being eager to return to their former positions, and being no longer under the influence of the contumacious Bencher, they were perfectly willing to renounce all aspirations in the direction of coat-tails.

But against any further trouble of this kind Mr. Stull had fully provided. The employees were all very well paid, but each man signed a printed contract by which he agreed that a certain percentage of his wages should be held back and forfeited in case of dismissal for misconduct, the most important breach of rule being any attempt to redress grievances by other means than those stated in the contract. Mr. Stull had given a great deal of time and thought to the construction of an agreement whic'

while it offered good men inducements to enter his service, would make it a losing business for them if they attempted to interfere with his methods of regulating the establishment. All these arrangements, with many others tending to place Vatoldi's on a higher pedestal than it had yet stood upon, were carefully carried into effect by John People, whose conferences with his superior not only took place every afternoon, but frequently occupied a large portion of the evening. An increase of custom quickly greeted the reopening of the restaurant, and Vatoldi's soon became a more crowded and fashionable resort than it had ever been before.

When all this had been accomplished, Mr. Stull thought himself entitled to a holiday, and repaired to his farm near Cherry Bridge, where not only could he take some country air, but look into the business with which Mr. Turby had been intrusted. It might seem a little odd to those who were not well acquainted with Miss Matilda Stull that she should have chosen the time of her father's coming for a visit of herself and her mother to the city; but Miss Matilda never allowed the coming or going of any one to interfere with her plans; and, although she had not formed this plan until she had heard of her father's intention, she declared it to be absolutely necessary that she should go to town to confer with mantua-makers, in preparation for the autumnal season. As she could not go alone, her mother, of course, must accompany her.

The absence of his wife and daughter at the time of his arrival at his farm did not at all disturb the

mind of Mr. Stull, who, having come to the country for a holiday, was not averse to a few days' freedom from interruption to thought and action. To be sure, his two younger daughters remained, but these were little girls who had learned how pleasant it was not to interfere with their father's occupations.

Mrs. Stull had now been made acquainted with her daughter's engagement, and it was, therefore, in the handsome rooms of the Stull city mansion that Mr. Crisman paid his frequent visits to his lady-love during her stay in town.

John People, once more behind his cashier's desk, and behind, indeed, nearly everything else in the establishment, deepened the lines of pensive resignation on his brow. The gentle roll in his gait became more than ever indicative of a determination to go ahead and do his duty, no matter how much care and trouble weighed upon him. All his hopes in the direction of Miss Stull had entirely departed. When Gay Armatt had told him that it was positively useless for him to speak a word of love to Miss Stull, he had gone away believing her absolutely and entirely. Of a truthful nature himself, he could appreciate truth when it was told to him by such a girl as Gay, and told as she told it. He had come to town fully convinced that Matilda Stull could be to him no more than an occasional customer in the restaurant over which he presided.

He took from an inner recess of his pocket-book a two-dollar note, in the corner of which were some initials and a date; and placing this in the money-drawer, he repaid himself with two dollars in silver. It gave him a sad pleasure a few minutes afterwards

to give this note, with other change, to a lady who was paying her bill. Thrown into the vortex of metropolitan circulation, there was no reason to suppose he would ever see it again. Not only did John thus snap asunder the only actual link between him and Miss Stull, but, like the practical man that he was, he resolved, if possible, to teach himself that he must turn away from looking after her; and in order to do this he must learn to look steadfastly in another direction. Therefore it was that with steadfast heart and resolute eyes he looked at Miss Burns.

Miss Burns was a young lady who stood behind the gentlemen's furnishing-goods counter of a large dry-goods store directly opposite Vatoldi's. John had bought cravats and gloves of her, and she, in turn, had taken many a meal at Vatoldi's. There were those of her companions who asserted that she thus sacrificed economy to convenience, because there were other restaurants, not far distant, where she could have been served more cheaply. Miss Burns liked Vatoldi's, and John had reason to believe that she also liked him, for in the two years during which they had interchanged patronage he had found frequent opportunities of making himself agreeable to her, and she had shown that he was agreeable. She was a girl of pleasant appearance, although a trifle over-thin; but John liked thin girls, and until his regard for Miss Stull began to crystallize itself into yearning, his occasional intercourse with Miss Burns had been exceedingly pleasant to him. But for months and months he had almost forgotten her. For her there was no corner in the refrigerator, nor any corner in his heart.

This change of manner had been noticed by Miss Burns, and for some time before the troubles began at Vatoldi's she had been forced to admit that it would have been quite as well for her to study economy at the expense of convenience and to take her midday meal at the restaurants frequented by her companions. But lately she had had a desire to view the renewed glories of Vatoldi's, and had several times visited the place. John had noticed her, and once had spoken to her, but there was that in his manner which showed the young woman that even this attention she owed entirely to his memory. But, as has been said, John had come to the determination to occupy his saddened eyes by turning them in the direction of Miss Burns.

It was about this time that there was brought to the restaurant a quantity of very choice clams. These were of such unusually attractive appearance that John bethought himself of exhibiting some of them on a long inclined shelf near his desk, on which were occasionally displayed some extraordinary fine specimens of fish, flesh, or fowl. To this work he devoted some comparatively leisure moments of the morning. As he arranged them on the shelf, his meditative soul began to influence his hands, and he formed the clams into letters, and gradually into words. He soon became much interested in his work, and selecting the smallest of the shell-fish, and carefully placing them, he formed a sentence in clams, which, in large letters, ran the whole length of the shelf. It read:

"Gone are all the hopes I cherished."

Stepping back, John gazed at his work with much satisfaction, and several of the waiters remarked upon it with approbation.

"You might have a new piece of poetry there every day," said one.

John smiled sadly. His desire for poetic selections was now very limited.

A little before one o'clock that day there entered into Vatoldi's Miss Matilda Stull. She was shopping in that region, and she wanted her luncheon. She expected, of course, that she would see John People there, but that made no difference to her; she had no intention of deserting her favorite restaurant because this young man happened to be the manager of it. She was well aware that she had led him by a very short string during the period in which she had hoped to make use of him, but she did not believe that here, in his place of business, he would presume upon that familiar intercourse which in the country is allowed among persons of different classes. If, however, anything of the kind should occur, she knew well how to treat it; and she entered Vatoldi's with all freedom and confidence.

The room was well filled, but she had not made three steps within the door before John saw her. A thrill went through him, and he stooped to conceal the consequences of it which appeared in his face. In a moment, however, he raised himself, and went on with his duties, keeping his eyes upon the work before him. He did not dare to look at her, for fear she would not recognize him, and that would be a jagged wound. It would be better for her to think he had

not seen her. At any rate he must have time to grasp the situation,—a very unexpected one to him, for he had supposed the lady to be in the country.

But it was not long before he found it impossible to avoid raising his eyes in her direction, and as he did so he met her glance. With a very slight smile which bore no sign of friendship, but merely indicated that acquaintance which, in the way of business, any one might have with another, she beckoned him to her. Surprised and very much embarrassed by this action, John approached her.

"Mr. People," she said, "how do you do? I would like to have the clams in those first three words," pointing as she spoke, "for my luncheon. Will you please have them stewed for me?"

John turned and gazed somewhat blankly at the sentence he had formed. "'Gone are all' won't make a full stew," he said. "Those clams are very small."

"They will be quite enough," said Miss Stull. "Please order them cooked."

There was a look which accompanied this injunction that would have convinced John, if he had needed convincing, of the absolute truth of what Gay Armatt had said to him. He turned without speaking, and walking to the shelf, gathered up, with his own hands, the clams which spelled "Gone are all." He handed them to an attendant, and ordered them stewed for the lady at the table opposite, and then stepped back to his desk, his heart like a clam within him.

In about five minutes he raised his eyes at the opening of the door, and he beheld Miss Burns entering.

He looked at her for a moment, and then his blood, which apparently had been greatly occupied elsewhere, came up into his face. He stood more erect, his whole body seemed to stiffen, and with a sudden resolve he walked to the new-comer, who sat behind Miss Stull, and much nearer the door.

"Miss Burns," said he, "we have some very fine clams to-day. Will you let me have a stew made for you?"

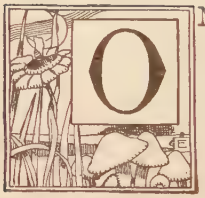
Gratified by this attention, Miss Burns immediately gave her assent. John now quickly stepped to the shelf, threw aside the last two letters of his sentence, and gathering up the clams which formed "the hopes I cherish," sent them to be stewed.

Miss Burns, following John's movements, saw the words before the clams were swept together, and, stooping, fumbled with the buttons of one of her boots.

The waiter thought the stew would be a large one, but he made no remark. There was something in John's eye which showed that he meant what he did.

Miss Stull, who was waiting for her stew, and had turned half around when John left the desk, saw the whole proceeding. It brought upon her face a smile, a very different one from that which had last been there, and a very good smile for John People.

## CHAPTER XXIX



N the day of his arrival at his farm Mr. Stull drove over to the county town, and had an interview with Zenas Turby. That energetic collector of debts and facts had made a very favorable report in regard to the iron on the Bullripple farm; and Mr. Stull now also received valuable information concerning the Western heirs to the farms held by himself and Enoch. These persons had been made acquainted by Mr. Turby's letters with the loss and injustice they had sustained, and of the fact that although the property in question was not very valuable, it was quite certain, if the affair was properly managed, that they could come into their rights without expensive process of law; the case being so plain that the parties in possession would probably not think it worth while to resist the setting aside of the illegal transfer and the immediate sale of the property with a rightful division of the proceeds.

"They must think," said Mr. Stull, "that the parties in possession are very great fools to give up what they have paid for without making a fight for it; but if it is to our advantage to appear foolish, let us do so by all means. I am perfectly willing to decline to

throw good money after bad in defending my title, and as to that man Bullripple, I imagine there will not be much trouble in making him take the same position, for I don't believe he can afford to go to law about it."

"Not he," sneered Mr. Turby. "When he can pay his taxes he is doing very well."

"What we have to do now," said Mr. Stull, "is to have the matter legally arranged as quickly as possible, and the sale ordered. I shall then buy both tracts."

"You will get them cheap," said Turby, "for there's nobody in these parts who will care to bid against you."

Mr. Stull wanted, of course, to get the land as cheaply as possible, having already paid for part of it; but as the amount paid had not been very large, he would have preferred to lose that, and to give a fair average price for the two farms, rather than to hold one of them by a tenure which would make it impossible for him to dispose of it justly, and unadvisable to invest any money in its improvement and development. His business sagacity had never before allowed him to buy property to which he could not receive a good title, but the opportunity to become possessed of the late Mr. People's farm for a small sum had been a tempting one, and had caused Mr. Stull to close the bargain and take his chances as to future settlement with heirs who might or who might not turn up. His chance now, he thought, was very good, and even if the land should not be valuable from a mineral point of view, he would be glad to

have a large and extensive country place in this picturesque region.

"I will see Bullripple myself," he said to Turby. "I think I can make him understand that his wisest course will be to step aside and make no opposition. And, by the way, you can mention to those Western people that it might be well for them to offer some inducements to the parties in possession to vacate their claims. Considering that we have paid our money, they ought to do that."

"I'll put that to them," said Turby, "and if they agree, it ought to help persuade that thick-headed Bullripple to step out."

The next morning Mr. Stull called upon Enoch, and appeared before him in the light of an injured man. His sense of injury, however, was mingled with a solemn dignity which forbade any violence of expression.

He told Enoch of the information he had received concerning the Western heirs, and then he added: "You have brought me, sir, into a very annoying predicament; a situation, I may say, which is unworthy of me."

"I'd like to know what I had to do with it?" asked Enoch.

"You had a great deal to do with it," replied Mr. Stull, with lofty severity. "You were apparently a man of probity in this vicinity, and you were the alleged owner of a property which had been acquired at the same time and in the same way as that which had belonged to your brother-in-law, and which I bought. With your example before my eyes, there

was no reason why I should hesitate to pay my money for that land."

"Considering how little you paid," said Enoch, "I don't think you had any reason to hesitate."

"That land, sir," continued Mr. Stull, without attention to the last remark, "as I am now informed, does not belong to me any more than this land belongs to you. But I have not come here to make reproaches. There are some losses which my self-respect teaches me to accept and say nothing about. I am here simply to know what you intend to do in the matter. If it is carried to the courts, I have no case, and you have no case. That will be followed by great expense and much annoyance, and by the loss of the land the same as if we had not gone to law. I consider that the proper, the honorable, and the honest course is for me and for you to accept the situation, to cease to insist upon an ownership in lands for which we have not paid all the rightful owners, and to accept whatever terms said owners are willing to offer us. Now, sir, do you intend to join me in this just and honorable course? Or do you propose to act in a stubborn and litigious manner, and so bring trouble and expense upon all concerned?"

Mr. Bullripple sat with his eyes half shut and fixed upon the ground. "It may be," he thought, "that this land has iron in it after all." Then he replied to Mr. Stull. "I can't say," said he, "upon a suddint this way, just exactly what I'll do. But I do declare it doesn't look a bit like you to give up this way just as soon as the thing is mentioned."

"When I am right," said Mr. Stull, with much loftiness, "I never give up; but when I am wrong, I deem it my duty to do so without delay, and I hope, sir, that you will see that it is also your duty as well as your interest."

"Well, Mr. Stull," said Enoch, rising, and taking two strides with his hands in his pockets, "I'll think it over, and see what is best to be done. And I guess the first thing to be done is to wait till we hear something positive from those fellows in the West."

"I have said all I have to say," said Mr. Stull. And he took his leave.

"Bullripple is too stupidly obstinate to agree with anybody," he said to himself as he walked away, "but if I give in, he'll have to."

Enoch was a good deal more disturbed by Mr. Stull's information than he had appeared to be. He had heard of these Western heirs, but had never put much faith in them, and he had believed, moreover, that his possession would in time give him a valid title which would be good against all claims. But he had never given himself any trouble to ascertain the existence or non-existence of other claimants, and had taken no legal measures, in fact, to protect himself in case claims should be brought.

Nothing, however, so disturbed his faith in the strength of his tenure of his farm as the fact that Mr. Stull had admitted that the title to his own farm was not a good one. He had never liked Stull, and since his discovery of the ownership of Vatoldi's he had had a thorough contempt for the man. But he knew him to be an unusually astute business man,

and when Mr. Stull stated that his title to a piece of property was not good, there was as much reason to believe that he had thoroughly examined the case and was correct in his view of it, as there was to believe that he never would have made the admission if it were possible to avoid it.

But Enoch's belief in Mr. Stull's business sagacity went still further. "That pie-man," he thought, "is pushin' this thing, and he wouldn't do it if he didn't expect to make somethin' out of it. If there wasn't no more of it than what he told me, he'd jus' keep quiet and let other people do what had to be done. Yes, sir," he said aloud to himself, after he had taken a few meditative turns with his hands in his pockets, "there's more in this thing than he wants me to see. It may be iron, and it may be something else; but, whatever it is, the pie-man is on the grab for it!"

Mr. Bullripple thought over this matter all the rest of the day and a good part of the night; and in the morning he laid the subject before Mr. Stratford. That gentleman listened with much attention; he was always interested in Enoch and his concerns. But before he could form any opinion in regard to the case, Mr. Bullripple, who was one of those persons who ask counsel of others for the purpose of having their own decisions supported, proceeded to give his views.

"Of course, I can't tell," said he, "exactly what that Stull is after, but I've given my brains a good badgerin', and I've pretty well made up my mind that when the whole thing is settled, it'll be Stull that's got these two farms, and not them Western men.

And when that's happened, I may as well get ready to walk, for he hates me wuss than he hates the devil."

"Why should that be?" asked Mr. Stratford, surprised.

"Oh, well," said Enoch, "he and I once had a little business together, and I got the better of him. It's not a thing I can talk about; but it made him hate me; there's no gettin' 'round that."

Remembering all that Enoch had told him at Vatoldi's about his being in search of a rat in a hole; and assuming, for he had never been so informed, that this search had been successful, it was not difficult for Mr. Stratford to put this and that together. He reflected that Enoch, who was always very free-spoken about his affairs, had never told him the result of his hunt for the rat, and had just admitted that he had had a piece of private business with Mr. Stull of which he could not speak, and it was natural that in Mr. Stratford's mind said Stull and said rat should merge themselves into the same personality.

This conclusion surprised Stratford very much. If Enoch had been earnestly looking for some one, it was tolerably certain that there was some one to look for, and he knew no reason why that some one should not be Mr. Stull. Stratford knew the man but slightly, and cared little for what he knew. It was, therefore, a matter of small concern to him that the bank president sold oyster stews, but it was a matter of very great concern that Enoch had discovered the fact. This old farmer was a man whose character and methods deserved careful study.

"Now, this is the way I've worked it out," continued Enoch. "If what Stull says is so, and I'm inclined to believe it is, for he wouldn't come to any man and tell him that he didn't own any particular thing if there was the least chance in the world of his keepin' it without fairly ownin' it, then I'm of the opinion that the quicker somethin' is done the better."

"What would you do?" asked Stratford.

"What I'd do," said Enoch, "would be this: I'd go straight out West, and see them other heirs. I'd look into their claims and see how good they was. It wouldn't cost much to do that. Then, if everything was all straight, I'd just ask 'em what they'd take for their claims. If they had any sense at all they'd rather take a middlin' fair price down in cash than to go to a lot of trouble and perhaps have the land sold for mighty little. I think I could put all that before 'em so's they could see it. Then I'd come home and go to somebody,—say to you, Mr. Stratford,—and borry the money I'd have to pay down; I'd be mighty keerful, too, to hunt up any other heirs, if there was any, and buy up their claims. When that was all done, I'd take the same law steps that them fellows would have took, and when the case was settled, the property needn't be sold to divide the money, for there'd only be one owner to the whole of it, and that would be me. When I'd got the deed all safe in my possession, I'd give the man who lent me the money —he'd have to trust me till then—a mortgage on the whole property. Then there couldn't be no turnin' out of house and home. I'd go on here the same as ever, payin' a fair and reg'lar interest on the mort-

gage. And as for Stull, if he likes that place, he could just live there as long as he liked, and I'd put the rent high enough to cover the interest I'd have to pay on the two places. If he didn't want to do that, he might go, and that farm could easily be sold for enough to pay off the whole mortgage. Now, isn't that a pretty straight and even plan? With all the iron left out, too, for that's a thing I don't believe in."

Stratford laughed. "It certainly is an ingenious plan, and may hold together. If I were you, I'd try it. I fear there are some weak points in your scheme, but they may not prevent its success. At all events, you would lose nothing by the trial, and I should be very sorry indeed to see this farm taken from you."

"Well, sir," said Enoch, "that's what you'd do if you was me. Now then, bein' yourself, would you advance me the money, and then take a mortgage on the land for it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Stratford; "if the facts are what you suppose them to be, and all the heirs are willing to sell out their claims, I'll advance the money."

"Good!" cried Mr. Bullripple, slapping one hard palm with the other. "And now I'll see if I can't match farm work ag'in' pie-bakin'."

"Enoch," said Mr. Stratford, with a smile, "you said too much that time."

"Perhaps I did," said the old farmer, "but slips don't count."

As he walked away Mr. Stratford felt more than ever convinced that if Enoch Bullripple, instead of being driven from his farm by the revengeful Stull, should succeed, without loss to himself or to any one,

in making that lofty personage pay him rent for his present country-seat, he would add very much to his previous claims to be considered a hundredth man. It was not the old farmer's cleverness and natural cunning that Stratford considered in this connection; it was his willingness, as shown in his extraordinary conduct at Vatoldi's, to throw himself, for the purpose of gaining his ends, into a position which nobody else would be likely to think of, or be courageous enough to take, which made our friend imagine that, in all probability, his search for a man, entirely unique and exceptional, had, at last, met with success.

## CHAPTER XXX

AY ARMATT did not find the presence of Mr. Thorne in the Cherry Bridge neighborhood that interruption to her studies and daily pursuits which she had supposed it would be. Her expectations had been that Mr. Stratford would find it necessary to give so much of his time to his friend that very little of it would be left for her. Of course there were studies and a good many daily pursuits which could very well be carried on without the presence of Mr. Stratford, but this did not suit Miss Gay. She had become accustomed to Stratford's helpful counsel and to the pleasure of his society. She liked them, and she did not wish to give them up. She was sitting at the feet of a master, and it would have greatly grieved her had circumstances compelled her to rise.

But Arthur Thorne did not prove to be such a circumstance. On the contrary, he was scrupulously careful not to interfere with the life which Gay was now leading. Stratford determined to go on with his visits to Mrs. Justin and his intercourse with Gay as if Thorne had not been there; while the younger man determined that his intercourse with Gay should be largely influenced by the fact that Stratford was

there. It was not his object to endeavor to supplant Stratford; this he knew he could not do; all he hoped was to make himself known, and perhaps favorably known, to the woman he loved. If, then, Stratford held to his word, his opportunity might come; at all events, he would not be a stranger to Gay Armatt. That point in Stratford's argument had made a strong impression on him.

It was Thorne's custom to walk over from the Cherry Bridge tavern in the afternoon, and often in the evening, and if he could talk or walk with one or both of the ladies, or play croquet with them, or do for them anything which they might wish him to do, he was very glad. If it happened that Stratford were there, and it often did so happen, Thorne showed no indisposition to join in any general occupation, though he avoided thrusting himself into any special one. He took the goods the goddesses gave, and was very thankful.

Mrs. Justin noticed all this, and though she really wished Mr. Thorne would stay away, she could not help honoring him for his thoughtful and courteous conduct. His visits could not be pleasant to her, favoring, as she did, a union between Stratford and Gay, but no man whom she knew could have brought upon himself under similar circumstances so small a taint of unpleasantness.

Gay did not know Mr. Thorne's object in coming to the house, but she soon found that, as far as she was concerned, his coming made no difference. This was very pleasant, and made her look upon the gentleman, especially at croquet, as an agreeable

addition to their little circle. She could not but see, too, although it did not strike her mind as soon as it did that of Mrs. Justin, how he refrained from putting himself in those paths which she and Mr. Stratford were wont to walk together. For that she liked Mr. Thorne better than for anything else.

As the days went on, the ladies of the Justin household began to appreciate the fact that two gentlemen friends were better than one, because the little vacancies and gaps which must occasionally be left by one of them could almost always be filled by the other. A more useful and agreeable second man than Mr. Thorne could scarcely be found. In most cases he was perfectly able to take the place of first man, and yet he was always willing to fall into the subordinate position. This indicated mental endowments of a kind very rare and very valuable.

Though Mr. Stratford was a frequent visitor at the Justin house, he did not come every day, and sometimes, of a morning, Arthur Thorne would stand and lean against the railings of the shady piazza where Gay was in the habit of doing her reading and studying, which, by the way, had become much more of a habit than in the early summer. At such times he did not stay very long, nor say very much, but it cost him an effort, which only a strong man could have given, to tear himself away and leave Gay undisturbed with her books. Several times Mrs. Justin noticed this proceeding, and she could not refrain from giving Mr. Thorne her unqualified admiration.

On one of these occasions Thorne remarked to Gay: "I wish very much, Miss Armatt, that there

was something inside the vast scope of human knowledge which I could help you to study. There ought to be something, but I don't believe there is."

Gay smiled. "I expect there are ever so many things," she said, "that you could teach me from beginning to end."

Thorne shook his head. "No," said he, "your studies are extensive enough already, and there is nothing I would undertake to teach except law; and in that, of course, you would take no interest."

"I am not so sure of that," said Gay. "There are a great many things about law which a woman ought to know, especially those things which particularly concern her, and of which I am totally ignorant."

"And would you like to know them?" eagerly asked Thorne.

"Certainly," answered Gay. "The object of my life, Mr. Thorne, is to know."

As she said this a little shade of darkness crept into that young face, which Thorne had never seen there before. It was so slight a shade that most persons would not have noticed it, but Thorne marked it, and referred it to the fact that a little while ago this young person had another object in life, which, in a tangible and acknowledged form, did not now exist.

"If you will allow me, Miss Armatt," he said, "it will give me very great pleasure to indicate to you some points of law which I really think you ought to understand, and without a knowledge of which, I do not hesitate to say, I believe no person should be called thoroughly educated. I can write out the points to which it would be well to direct your attention,

and give you authorities and references which you can make use of if you like. Then you can look into the subject at your convenience, and I can always furnish you with any books you may want."

"You are very kind, indeed, Mr. Thorne," said Gay, "and I think your suggestion a sensible and practical one. There are many general principles of law, and particular applications, too, which I am sure would be of use to me, and which I really ought to know if I ever expect to call myself well informed. It would be entirely too much for you to write out subjects and references, as you are so good as to suggest, and I would not ask you to put yourself to so much trouble; but if you could talk over the matter with me when it is perfectly convenient to you, I should be very much obliged indeed. It wouldn't interfere at all with my other work, for I have plenty of spare time."

As Gay said this she had a consciousness that she was conferring a favor, and that it was pleasant to confer it. She was entirely honest in the expression of her desire to know something of the laws under which she lived; but she also felt that Mr. Thorne was a young man of such kindly disposition that it was a kindness to him to give him an opportunity to be kind.

Mr. Thorne was charmed. He went away to his room in the Cherry Bridge tavern, and set himself to work to prepare from the resources of his very extensive information a concise but comprehensive summary of some of the fundamental principles of law

which everybody ought to know, and also of such specific points as women in particular ought to know. The work interested him greatly, and it was not until his lamp burned out that night that he laid down his pen. Early the next morning he hired a horse and rode over to the county town, where he asked the privilege from a lawyer to make abstracts from some of his legal books.

It was several days before Arthur Thorne had prepared to his satisfaction his ground plan of the legal education of Gay Armatt. When it was finished he betook himself to the Justin mansion with his papers in his pocket, determined on no account to obtrude the matter upon her attention did not a favorable opportunity present itself.

His opportunity came immediately. He found Gay and Mrs. Justin sitting together, and the young lady received him with unusual cordiality. "I hope, Mr. Thorne," she said, "that you have come prepared to talk law. I have thought of no less than four things that I want to ask you immediately, although I suppose you will wish to begin with Magna Charta, or some such foundation-stone."

"I am quite ready," he said, pulling out his papers, "and Magna Charta can wait. Now, what are your four points?"

Mrs. Justin had been told by Gay of the proposed plan of legal instruction, and she had not favored it. It would give Thorne too many advantages, and besides, she thought that Gay was working too hard already. But her young friend set aside all her ob-

jections. These things would be but trifles, she declared, and even were it otherwise, she had never felt so much like work in her life.

Mrs. Justin had not withdrawn her objections, but after a little talk with Mr. Thorne she withdrew herself, and left the two to settle the four points. When, that evening, she told Mr. Stratford of Gay's new course of study he did not object.

"It seems rather an odd thing to do," he said, "but then Gay Armatt is somewhat of an odd young lady, and as for Arthur Thorne, although he is generally most oddly proper, I have found that, upon occasion, he can be properly odd."

Mrs. Justin shrugged her shoulders. "I do not like it at all," she said.

"I think I do," replied Stratford. "A certain amount of knowledge of that kind will be very useful to Miss Armatt, and Thorne is just the man to give it to her."

"He is just the man who should not give it to her," quickly replied Mrs. Justin. "Horace Stratford, you are either blind or wickedly foolish."

"My dear friend," said Mr. Stratford, "I wish that I could make you understand that I am neither."

"That you can easily do," said Mrs. Justin, "by marrying Gay." And there the conversation stopped.

Not every day, but still often, Gay and Arthur, with a great deal of earnest interest on each side, pursued their legal studies. It was but a slight skeleton of a course of study, but it was one calculated to place a woman in a position of intelligence with regard to her relations with her fellow-beings

which would give her great advantages over other women who did not occupy that position. To Gay it was all very pleasant; it helped and satisfied her desire to make herself thoroughly well informed and cultured. To Arthur Thorne it was heaven.

The weeks passed on, and touches of red and yellow began to appear here and there in the foliage, while the days became so perceptibly shorter that those who drove out in the afternoon frequently came home under the twinkling light of the evening star. The accustomed intercourse of Stratford and Gay continued without a change, except that it now received from Mrs. Justin certain favoring impulses which, before, she had not been wont to give it; and the occasional intercourse of Gay and Thorne became more friendly and easy, in spite of the absolute want of encouragement shown to it by Mrs. Justin.

Had any one appeared in the neighborhood of Cherry Bridge, and declared that at any season of the year in any part of that country there was the slightest trace of malaria, he would probably have fared badly. Mrs. People would have been glad to scratch the skin from his defaming face, and if no one, in fact, should offer to him personal injury, he would have been so borne down with contempt and condemnation that he would have yearned to flee to some region the pride of whose people in their healthy surroundings he had not shocked.

Mrs. Justin was very prudent concerning public opinion. Upon no account would she say a word against this general belief in the healthfulness of the neighborhood. But in her own mind she now began

to be of the opinion that Gay Armatt was suffering from some sort of malarial influence. She was not at all the same girl that she was when she came to that Cherry Bridge country. Her mental activity was as great as ever, but she could now be tired by a moderate walk, or even a very long drive. There were other indications of an unsatisfactory state of health, which were not generally noticeable, but easily perceived by the quick eye of Mrs. Justin. At first she attributed Gay's apparent decrease in physical stamina to her studies, but she soon gave up that idea. The work done by her young friend was not enough to injure any healthy person of her years, and it was intermingled with constant recreation and outdoor life. There was something too much of it, and it might occasionally have made Gay appear a little weary. But the effects of study were not sufficient to account for the symptoms Mrs. Justin noticed.

The village doctor was called in, and he prescribed a tonic, but this was of no benefit; and therefore it was that Mrs. Justin privately made up her mind that there were in the atmosphere malarial influences to which Gay was peculiarly susceptible, and that she would not be better until she should go away.

If Gay had moped, or had been lowspirited, or had shown any symptoms of retrospective melancholy, Mrs. Justin would have attributed her condition to the broken engagement. But there was nothing of the kind. Gay had behaved admirably after her great trial. She had kept up her spirits, and it was only in physical action that she showed any decrease in strength and activity. This state of mind Mrs.

Justin attributed in great degree to the influence of Mr. Stratford. There was no possible doubt of the fact that Gay could not so constantly associate with him without discovering by contrast the inferiority and unworthiness of the man who had left her.

Having determined that Gay's health demanded a complete change of scene and air, Mrs. Justin also considered it her duty to bring about that change without loss of time; she therefore made the necessary preparations to go to her winter home in New York. Gay expected at the end of her Cherry Bridge sojourn to spend some time with her relatives in Maryland, but this Mrs. Justin would not allow. The country at this season was evidently no place for Gay; she must go to the city. In the course of a week the Justin house was closed, and Gay and its owner had departed for New York.

Mr. Thorne had already gone home. He had not had so many of those delightful interviews with Gay as he would have liked to have, and he had not taught her a quarter as much law as he would have wished to teach her. But he had seen her frequently, and his course had been so well begun that it would be easy to take it up at any time; and, on the whole, Mr. Thorne was well satisfied; nay, more, he was warmed and exhilarated by his sojourn at Cherry Bridge. To give himself this special holiday he had broken away from his professional pursuits and had left his business in the hands of an associate. But he did not in the least reproach himself for this departure from his usual habits of life. Nothing could be wiser than to give a few weeks to the furtherance

of an object which was more important to him than any other object could possibly be.

Mr. Stratford remained at the Bullripple farm. The weather was still pleasant and there was no reason why he should not stay in the country as long as he had hitherto been accustomed to stay. It was true that the region seemed more lonely than in former years when he had been there by himself, and he thought he was a little tired of the country. But it would have been ridiculous for him to have hurried away after Mrs. Justin and Gay. He promised himself, however, and indeed he had said as much to the ladies, that he would not stay among the mountains very long. His promise to himself was partly based on conviction that Gay's future happiness might depend in a greater degree on his presence in the city than it had lately depended on their companionship out here. What sudden exposure to her former peril might there occur he did not know.

One afternoon Stratford came to the fence on the top of the eminence from which he and Gay had once watched the sunset. He seated himself on the upper rail of the fence, and thoughtfully gazed over the landscape towards the western sky. Suddenly his eyes fell upon two persons emerging from the grove of sugar-maples on the level ground beneath him. It was Miss Matilda Stull and a gentleman, whom, to his astonishment, he speedily recognized as Mr. Crisman. They did not come up towards him, but turned away, walking along the bottom of the hill. Their very intimate manner as they moved away, hand in hand, gave assurance that they had

not noticed Stratford, and the very intimate converse in which they were evidently engaged gave good reason for their not noticing anything but themselves.

Stratford could scarcely explain to himself why the appearance of these two persons, for whom he had such slight regard, should have such a sudden and disturbing effect upon him. He had heard from Mrs. People that Miss Stull and her mother had returned to the farm, but he had known nothing of Crisman's presence in the neighborhood. It was simply impossible to doubt the relations of these two young persons to each other. The expression of their faces, and their whole demeanor and action, showed that they were lovers.

Nothing should have given Stratford greater satisfaction than this. If Crisman were in love with that young woman down yonder, Gay's peril was over. But, instead of a thrill of pleasure, Stratford felt a shock. His soul was filled with a startling conviction that his work was done; that he had carried Gay Armatt over the gap!

Slowly, and without noticing the world beneath his feet, or the sky above him, Stratford descended from the fence and walked homeward.

## CHAPTER XXXI

HE sugar-maples were yet in a glow of crimson; the hillsides were yet green; the sunshine was yet warm and cheering, when Mr. Stratford announced to Mrs. People his intention of returning to his city home.

"It's a good deal earlier than you've ever gone yet," said she, "and I'm very sorry for it. But it's not to be wondered at, for you must find it very lonely here with everybody away, and even Enoch himself gone out West, which is a thing he never did before, and which I hope won't end by his becomin' a emigrant, for I'm sure I don't want to go into any such wild country, or indeed into any country at all, except here, which I'm sure is a good enough place for anybody; and why Enoch shouldn't be satisfied to stay where he is, with everything comfortable around him, and crops as good as his neighbors, and plenty to eat and drink, I can't see for the life of me. If you knew the Stull fam'ly, now, they might be some company for you; but then, ag'in, I don't s'pose you could git much out of 'em. Old Stull himself has gone back to town, and the two little girls have gone to school, but that Stull young woman and her mother are here ag'in, and, what's more, that Mr. Crisman, who Miss

Armatt gave the sack to, is here too and courtin' Miss Matilda as if he was tryin' to ketch a train. Well, well," continued the good woman, corrugating her brow as the memory of broken schemes came to her, "things don't always turn out as they're wanted to, but I don't mind sayin' it to you, Mr. Stratford, that if I had ever turned out to be that girl's mother-in-law, I couldn't have lived with her, which would have had its advantages in one way, for then I'd 'a' lived here, and not there, which would 'a' suited me better, for I don't want to leave Enoch, and if John had got the old place I'd been satisfied and asked no more; and, although Mrs. Stull is her own mother, the best I can wish for her is that she won't have to live with her, which, considerin' what kind of a man he must be which Miss Gay and Mrs. Justin had to give his walkin' papers to, won't be exactly what people mean when they talk about a heaven on earth."

When Stratford returned to New York, thoroughly convinced of Mr. Crisman's new attachment, his mind, instead of being in a state of certainty and decision, was in a condition of very great uncertainty, in regard to what he would do, and of very great indecision as to what he ought to do. Gay being free from Crisman, as she surely was, his appointed work was done; and what excuse could he make to himself for continuing that work? That dangerous space over which he had proposed to carry the young fellow-being in whom he had taken so great an interest had proved narrower than he had supposed it would be, and was already crossed. The vision of Arthur Thorne standing on the opposite bank proved this.

Whatever might or might not happen to Gay from Thorne's love of her, the girl had no present need of Horace Stratford.

This was all clear and plain enough, and yet Stratford did not say to himself that his work being done he would step aside. "I will see her first," he thought, "and then I will decide upon my plan of action." The next morning after his arrival in the city, he went to Mrs. Justin's house. Gay had gone out, but Mrs. Justin was delighted to see him.

"I was afraid," she said, "that this fine weather would keep you in the country, and it is very encouraging to see you make your appearance so soon. And as for Gay, I am glad to say that her condition is improved. To be sure, she eats very little, she is easily tired, and she will not take medicines, but since she came to the city she is brighter and shows more interest in things. And I am quite sure," said Mrs. Justin, looking steadfastly at Stratford, "that your exchange of the pleasures of the autumnal season for premature town life will have a beneficial effect upon her."

There was point to this remark, for Stratford was an earnest sportsman, and it had hitherto been his custom to invite some of his friends to Cherry Bridge during the shooting season.

"I shall be very glad," said he, "if in any way I can be of benefit to Miss Armatt."

"Don't be so cold and formal!" exclaimed the lady. "Why not look at the matter in a natural and sensible light? Gay has missed you, and will be ever so glad to meet you again, and you know that I

shall be more than glad to see you together again. Do you know why she is brighter and more cheerful than she was?"

"On account of the change to the city air, I suppose," he answered. "That is often of as much advantage as change to country air."

"It is nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Justin. "As soon as I decided that she was to come with me to town and not to make her expected visit to Maryland, she began to brighten. I know she wants to see her sister, but I also know that she wishes very much more to be with you, and if she had gone home she probably would have staid there until she began her post-collegiate course. But now that her health obliges her to be here with me, and, consequently, with you, her conscience is satisfied, and she is happier."

Stratford made no reply, but turned to a window and looked out.

"Of course you have heard," said Mrs. Justin, after a short silence, "that Mr. Crisman is paying attention to Miss Stull. I had the news from Mrs. People, who wrote to me about my winter supply of poultry, and inserted the item as a bit of flavoring. She says he is there every week."

"I have heard that," said Stratford.

"I must admit," continued the lady, "that when I received this news I was mortified that a man could so quickly turn from our Gay to Matilda Stull. And yet, upon thinking it over, I believe that we ought to feel rather satisfied than otherwise. Knowing as I do that Mr. Crisman is totally unworthy of Gay, I can-

not but feel somewhat pleased that he has been able to compensate himself for any injury he may imagine he received at our hands."

Mrs. Justin arose, and stood beside Stratford. "Our old ships are now all behind us, and burned," she said, "and I pray for the most favoring winds to fill the new sails which shall bring Gay and you together. Now, don't say anything! That is one of the remarks to which no answer is required."

When Stratford called the next day he was received by Gay in the library, a room which Mrs. Justin now almost entirely surrendered to her young friend. The light from the high, wide window fell full upon the young girl as she arose, bright-eyed, to greet her visitor. When Gay reseated herself upon the soft-cushioned chair, the action showed a change in her which was instantly noticed by Stratford. The Gay Armatt of the old days at Cherry Bridge had never reclined. She was a girl who sat up straight, who moved quickly, whose presence suggested youthful vigor and activity.

Stratford drew a low chair near her and placed it so that he could face her as they talked. Whatever might be her present lack of strength or vitality, it had not affected her beauty. Never had she seemed so charming to the eyes of Stratford. Her morning dress of blue may have relieved the delicate color in her cheek, and brought out the pure whiteness of her neck and wrists, and the happy light in her eyes may have given something of its brightness to the smile upon her perfect lips, and even her unwonted languor may have infused new grace into that half-reclining figure; but, whatever were the reasons, Stratford now

sat before a woman whose beauty fully satisfied him. He had always given due appreciation to Gay's personal attractions, but heretofore he had felt that there was something wanting, some little touch, he knew not what. That touch had now been given.

"Do you see this?" said Gay, holding up a book which had been lying open and face downward upon a little table at her side. "Perhaps you are not familiar with this style of literature. It is what is popularly called a novel."

"I am very familiar with novels," said Stratford, "and I have read that one."

"And I have read those," said Gay, pointing to a pile of books on the floor by the window, "and all of them in a little more than a week. I expected that by this time I should be working away in superheated mathematics and that sort of thing, but Mrs. Justin has put an interdict on study. I do scarcely anything but read novels and look at clothes. Whenever we go out we always go to shops, and, although we don't buy much, we have all sorts of things spread out and wonder how they would look made up. Mrs. Justin says that clothes-cogitation is very restful to the mind."

"Does your mind need rest?" asked Stratford.

"I don't know," said Gay. "My body seems to need a good deal of it, and Mrs. Justin says I must show no favoritism; one must have just what the other gets. You see, I have given up thinking for myself; Mrs. Justin does that for me now."

"I did not suppose," said Stratford, "that you would ever allow any one to do your thinking for you."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Gay, "you don't know how nice it is! You ought to try it. By the way," she added, with a quick start of animation, "will you let me do some thinking for you?"

"It will be something entirely novel to me," said Stratford, "and I should like it as a bit of experience."

"Well, then," said Gay, "please empty your mind of everything in it, and I will fill it for you. You are now thinking as follows: Here is a girl, or I should say a young woman, who is not feeling so much like an English sparrow as she did during the summer, but is quite as well and quite as strong as a good many people who work or study or slave in all sorts of ways all day long, and a great part of the night besides. She has a friend, a dear friend, who is one of the noblest women on earth, and who is quite as good and lovely as it is possible for any woman to be, but who has, in spite of all this, a blot upon her character. This is that she is too kind. It is a white blot, and a very beautiful one to look at, but still it is a blot, and it interferes with her ability to make the young person I am thinking of do what she ought to do. She lets this white blot spread itself over her sober judgment and several of her other good qualities, and she tells this young person that she must not do anything all day that is in the least bit like work or study. Now, I know this is all wrong. That girl would be a great deal happier, and it would be ever so much better for her in every way, if she were to shut up the novel she is reading, and stop short without knowing what happens next or how it ends,

and apply herself to matters that are of importance and value; and if she takes up again those things which are the real object of her life she will become as much interested in them as she used to be, and will pay no attention to those little tired feelings which soon grow up into incurable laziness if one is not very careful. Now, I shall talk to that young person and make her see these things as I do. I don't think it will be at all difficult. I shall tell her that if she continues in her present indolent condition she will get rusty in the studies she has been working at this summer, and if she goes backward instead of keeping straight on, as I am sure her soul is longing to do, I really do not know what will become of her. I am quite certain she will take my advice, because she has the greatest confidence in my judgment. And indeed, considering how I have helped her and counseled her, and in all sorts of ways been of the greatest good and service to her, she must be horribly stupid if she don't know by this time that what I advise she ought to do. There is another reason, too, why I should advise her. If I sit and look at her reading novels and neglecting her duties and cultivating habits of laziness, and say nothing about it, I shall make her think that, though I must disapprove of what she is doing, I am keeping quiet merely because she is not quite well and ought to be treated like a child or an invalid. Now, I know that this will grieve her very much, and so I shall speak out, and tell her that she ought to take up her work just where she put it down when she left Cherry Bridge, and I shall also tell her that when I can—that is to say, of course,

not so often as I used to do in the country, but at times when it will not interfere with anything else I want to do—I will come and help her, and give her little hints about all sorts of things, just as I did when we were in the country together. And now, sir," said Gay, who by this time was sitting up straight in her chair, her face slightly flushed and every trace of languor gone, "how do you like your train of thought?"

While Gay had been speaking, Stratford had sat gazing upon her. He had heard nearly all she had said, but some phrases here and there had escaped his attention, because his mind was so busily at work for itself. "Do I love this beautiful girl?" he asked himself, as Gay's words gave to his mind a vision of one who extends her hands to a friend without intending or knowing that those outstretched arms may, instead, receive a lover.

As Stratford thus sat, thinking and listening, one of his arms hung over the side of his low chair, and as he unconsciously moved his hand his fingers touched a bow of ribbon on one of the folds of Gay's dress which lay upon the floor. Entirely unnoticed by her, he took an end of the ribbon between his thumb and finger and gently held and pressed it. This was on Gay; it was a part of her; it was a link between him and that beautiful creature flushing and warming before him. Through that bit of blue ribbon might pass an electric thrill which should change his being and make him blind to extended hands, seeing only outstretched arms.

He crumpled the ribbon in his fingers, his blood flowed quicker, and his eye grew brighter. "I could love her," he said to himself.

Gay went on talking. She was making him know now how much she depended on him, and how desirous she was for his society. She was sitting erect, and therefore nearer to him, but her eyes were fixed upon his face, and she knew not that he held her ribbon. "I could love her," he repeated to himself. Then his mind stopped, and began to work backward. "But if I do love her," he thought, "I shall never love myself again. I have sworn that I would do this thing, and that I would go through it without blame or blemish; and, to me, the purest love of this girl would be blame and blemish."

He dropped the ribbon from between his fingers, and placed his hand upon the arm of his chair.

"And now, sir," said Gay, "how do you like your train of thought?"

Stratford answered slowly. "I am not sure," he said, "but that it might be of advantage for you to take up your studies again; at least to a moderate extent. At any rate, as you so much desire it, it may be well to make the trial. Of course I shall be much pleased to drop in here from time to time and give you all the assistance that I can."

Then, after some inquiries in regard to Mrs. Justin, and some messages for her, he took leave of Gay, and went away with a cold face and a hot and troubled heart.

"My work is done," he said to himself. "Yes," he reasserted, as he clinched his fist, "it is done, done, done!"

When Mrs. Justin returned home, she disapproved entirely of what Gay told her Mr. Stratford had

advised. Indeed she spoke a little petulantly about it. "I cannot imagine what he could have been thinking of," she said. "Instead of being well enough to study, you seem to me to be less able to endure any sort of work than you were some days ago. I shall allow no studying; you may be sure of that."

Gay was lying back in the library chair, her novel in her lap, open at the same pages which had been turned down on the table when Stratford had left her an hour before. "You mustn't find fault with Mr. Stratford," she said. "I advised him to advise me as he did, and I told him I hoped he would sometimes come and help me in the old way. He said he would, and I don't think he minded the trouble at all. I don't think he minded much either way. He is always very good."

"Gay," said Mrs. Justin, "have you been talking a very great deal? Why do you close your eyes in that way while you speak to me?"

"I don't know," said Gay. "I can't explain exactly how I feel. I am not hungry; I can't think of anything in particular that I care for. I have been trying to rouse myself up by thinking how I am wasting my time, but I don't believe I care just now whether I am wasting my time or not. I don't know exactly why, but this world seems to me an aimless sort of place."

Mrs. Justin gazed tenderly and kindly on the face of her young friend. "But it would be an easy matter, my dear, to make it a world full of purpose."

"I suppose so," answered Gay, closing her eyes again as she languidly clasped her hands above her head.

## CHAPTER XXXII

VATOLDI'S was now enjoying what might be called a regenerated success. The total cessation of business during the alterations had given the public time to forget all about the boycotting troubles as well as the decadence of the establishment during the administration of Enoch Bullripple, while the great improvements now seen in the restaurant brought it not only its old customers but an abundance of new ones. The cooks, in their caps, baked, boiled, and broiled with enthusiasm and content; the waiters, in their jackets and aprons, gave solicitous attention to the desires of every comer; and John People stood behind his new desk, with his form as round, his carriage as upright, and his hair as smoothly brushed as of yore. But upon his brow there was more of cheerfulness and less of resignation. Some of this change arose from the fact that John was now a partner in the concern — a partner in a very small degree in fact, but still a partner; and it was not necessary to be so much resigned when what he did was partly for his own benefit. It is probable, although John would not have admitted it, that his increase of cheerfulness was due in a very great part

to his total loss of Matilda Stull. John's attachment to this young lady had been very wearing upon him. When hope lent him no assistance his progress was slow and painful, and when she gave him a helping-hand she carried him along entirely too fast; he lost his breath, his legs became weak. It was well for him that he was stopped in time; now his breath was full and regular, his pace moderate, and his legs were strong.

There was a new refrigerator, and in one corner there frequently stood a plate containing a plump, fat mutton-chop, a piece of tenderloin, or a choice veal-cutlet; seldom did it hold a sweet-bread or bit of dainty game, for Miss Burns was the owner of a vigorous appetite and a moderate purse. This young lady was now an habitual customer of Vatoldi's. There was something about the place which made a meal in any other restaurant extremely unsatisfactory to her; and if, for any reason, a day passed without her coming there, John was sure to drop in at the store and inquire about her health.

Miss Burns enjoyed more than the ordinary advantages of Vatoldi's, for John made it his business to see that her preference for that place was not detrimental to her fortune. From the amount due on the little bill which she presented to him he invariably deducted a certain percentage. To this the young lady frequently demurred and shook her head, but John, who had always something else to do, and who was not in the habit of talking much to customers at the desk, passed over her objections with a smile and gave his attention to the something else. Miss Burns

would have demurred still more had she known that John never failed to make up the deficit in her payments out of his own pocket. She ought to have supposed this, but young ladies who are thinking of Johns do not always think of everything else.

The time came, however, when John felt that he must explain this financial method; and one evening, when the diners at Vatoldi's had all finished their meals, he called on Miss Burns at her boarding-house.

"I am sorry," said John, when he had explained the object of his visit, "that you ever thought it worth while to say anything about those little discounts, for the matter is really of no consequence at all. You see, I have a share in the business."

"Oh, yes," said Miss Burns, "I always supposed that."

"Yes," said John, "and people have thought I owned a good deal bigger part of it than is really the truth. But that's neither here nor there, and don't hurt anybody. Now, it is to my interest to make the restaurant as pleasant a place as I can to everybody, and if I have any particular friend who finds it convenient to come there, I'm sure I ought to make it pleasant for her. And I leave it to yourself to say if it is not pleasanter to feel that you're partly taking lunch with a friend — not entirely, for perhaps you wouldn't do that, but partly — than to always sit down to an out-and-out bought meal?"

Miss Burns was crocheting an afghan. It was a good-sized one, big enough to cover a lounge which would be long enough for a gentleman to lie down upon. She got the wools at cost price from the store

in which she was employed, and could, therefore, afford to make a fine large afghan. It had three plain dark green stripes, and two Roman stripes of bright and variegated colors. She was working on one of the Roman stripes now.

"That would be very nice," she said, "if one came to visit, but then you know I don't come to visit you."

John was about to ask, "Not even partly?" but, being a slow speaker, he had time to think that it would not do to intimate anything like that.

"And you know," continued Miss Burns, working a thread of dark blue into her stripe, "that it isn't right to have a gentleman regularly giving you things, especially your daily food; though, of course, you only do it partly; but that is what it comes to."

John passed his hand over his brow, and then turning his chair so as more directly to face Miss Burns, he put his right elbow upon the table at which they sat, and, intently gazing into her face as he spoke, he said: "I am sorry your mind is made up in such a way that you don't like to accept a little hospitality from a friend, not because of what it is, for it really amounts to nothing at all, but only because it comes regular. But what would you say to a friend who would give you not only part of your lunch, but all of it? And not only your lunch, but your breakfast and dinner, and a supper too if you were inclined that way; and not only week days, but Sundays, and every day; and who would give you, besides, every frock you wore, your shoes, your bonnets, gloves, umbrellas, and trimmings, and everything needful from hair-pins to cloaks?"

As John spoke thus, Miss Burns's complexion, which was usually a little pallid, began to assume the hue of some pale pink wool which lay in her basket, but she did not speak, nor look up from her work, and John went on:

"And what would you say if, every time you wanted anything, whether it was to wear, or to eat, or to use in a house, or for sickness or health, or for journeys, or for friends in trouble, or for your own pleasures and joys and comforts, you went to this friend and you took them from him?"

Miss Burns's complexion had been gradually changing from the color of the pink wool to that of a ball of ashen gray hue which also lay in the basket. A sickening fear came over her that she might have mistaken the significance of John's words.

"Do you mean Providence?" she asked.

"No, me," said John.

The color of the brightest scarlet in Miss Burns's basket now flushed into her face. "That would be very nice," she presently said; and no Berlin wool could be softer than her tone.

John People was a straightforward man of business with a conscience, and when everything had been satisfactorily arranged between Miss Burns and himself, he deemed it his duty to inform his principal that he was going to be married. Seldom before had Mr. Stull been so thoroughly angry. John had been forgiven for the sins of his uncle and had been again taken into dignified favor, but the vile and treacherous action which he now proposed raised against him the

wildest storm of Mr. Stull's indignation. What would a secret be worth — an overwhelmingly important secret — in the hands of a newly married man! With John as a bachelor — and Mr. Stull expected that his sense of honor and duty to his employer would keep him such — the secret was safe; but with a young wife secrecy might as well be blown to the winds and the bank president advertise in the daily papers that he was prepared to furnish the public with refreshments at his restaurant known as Vatoldi's. John's intentions might be honorable, but his wife would worm the secret out of him, and the world would soon know all. Better that John should die than marry! Had Mr. Stull lived two hundred years before, he would have slain his manager on the spot.

This blow to Mr. Stull was aggravated by the fact that his mind was beginning to assume its normal condition of august tranquillity. All his branches of business were now proceeding to his entire satisfaction, and Enoch Bullripple, the only present thorn in his side, promised soon to become an insignificant prickle. The Western heirs of the Cherry Bridge farms had been informed of the nature of their claims, and Mr. Turby, who desired to act as their agent as well as that of Mr. Stull, had written to them that there was every reason to believe that the matter could be settled with but little loss of time and the sale of the property ordered for the benefit of the heirs. Mr. Stull's plans were all made. He would buy both farms, not in his own name, but in that of a Mineral Development Company which he would organize. In the course of time this purchase would probably

prove a good investment. Enoch Bullripple would be ejected from the farm he now held, but, as he possessed Mr. Stull's secret, his subsequent treatment must be very prudently managed. Mr. Stull owned some Western lands, and he would sell Enoch Bullripple a small tract of these, securing himself by mortgage. He would then, if necessary, assist the old man to go out there and settle. The motive for this great generosity would be ascribed to Mr. Stull's interest in John People. With Enoch Bullripple out in Idaho, and under obligation, Mr. Stull would feel that he had punished the cunning villainy of the old farmer without endangering his secret.

But now John's announcement had banished every trace of august tranquillity. Mr. Stull's anger almost overcame him. Anathemas, reproaches, and denunciations crowded to his lips, but in the midst of his indignation he felt the necessity for prudence. Even so faithful a worm as John might turn.

"I shall say nothing to you now," he growled; "I will speak about this another time."

It would have been utterly impossible for Miss Matilda Stull to choose a more unsuitable moment than the evening of that day in which to announce to her father her engagement to Mr. Crisman. Mr. Stull was in the library of his spacious city mansion, a room furnished with everything that the library of a gentleman of wealth and culture should contain. The books on the shelves were most admirably selected, many of them being imported expressly for Mr. Stull, as he declined to introduce reprints into his library. The furniture was heavy and elegant. The

walls, the floors, the windows, showed that the room had been furnished with thoughtful taste. Even those things with which a gentleman solaces himself in the intervals of study were not forgotten; on a pair of stag's horns over the mantelpiece hung several handsome pipes, and an Eastern jar filled with tobacco stood beneath them; through the glass doors of a buffet which stood in a corner could be seen decanters and glasses; and between two framed engravings of hunting-scenes hung a pair of fencing-foils and wire masks; while from a nickel-plated hook was suspended flat against the wall a large hammock of rare and beautiful workmanship which might be stretched to another nickel-plated hook in the opposite wall.

Yet in spite of all these appurtenances of elegant and comfortable studiousness, this was a room to be looked at, but not used. Mr. Stull was content to own his books; he did not care to read them, and the cases were always locked. He did not smoke, and the pipes on the stag's horns had never been used. He tasted wine or spirits only on rare occasions, and not a drop of their contents had ever been poured from the decanters in his buffet. He was not a fencer, and the foils and masks were fastened to the wall. He was a man who did not lounge, and the hammock on the hook was never stretched to the opposite wall. The room was furnished so as to appear as Mr. Stull thought a gentleman's library and study ought to appear, but he used no part of it except a small table under a gaslight, with a drawer

in which he kept writing materials, and a leather-covered chair which always stood before it.

In this chair, and at this table, sat Mr. Stull when his daughter entered the room. Paper lay before him, and he had a pen in his hand, but he was not writing; he was savagely thinking, and endeavoring to form a plan of action in regard to John People. Miss Matilda saw that her father was in a very bad humor, and yet she did not hesitate in her purpose. She had not come to ask anything of her august parent; she had come to tell him something.

Mr. Stull looked up darkly, and encountered the somewhat petite but extremely well-formed features of Miss Matilda, upon which an expression of calm determination seemed to have been set and screwed. Without a preface, and with no sign of embarrassment, she briefly announced the fact that she and Mr. Charles Crisman, now in business in the mercantile house of Irkton, Perrysteer & Co., had made an engagement to marry each other.

Mr. Stull pushed back his chair with an imprecation which seldom fell from his dignified lips. "What do you mean?" he exclaimed.

"I mean exactly what I have said," answered his daughter Matilda.

Now rose J. Weatherby Stull in his wrath. In one day two persons, wholly dependent on him for everything they had in the world, had come to him and declared their intention of making unlawful marriages, for to him a marriage against his will was unlawful. To the first offender he had, as yet, said nothing or

done nothing; but in this case, no caution, no prudence was necessary, and he launched upon his daughter the paternal thunder. He bade her never to mention again to him this stranger of whom she had spoken. He forbade her ever to speak to, or to write to, or even to think of, said stranger; and he ordered her to her room, there to remain until he had determined how she should be punished, and where she should be sent to be cured of this most unnatural, most disrespectful, and most atrocious folly.

Miss Stull declined to do any of these things.

Mr. Stull arose. "Do you wish me to take you by force to your room? Am I to be driven crazy by members of my family and by hirelings? Am I to hear twice a day that these dependents upon me intend, without my permission, and against my will, to marry?"

"Was the other one John People?" asked Miss Matilda.

Mr. Stull sat down as if he had been shot.

"John People!" he gasped. "What is he to me?"

"He manages your restaurant," calmly replied his daughter, "and I have reason to believe that he wants to marry."

Mr. Stull sat and looked steadfastly at his daughter. Not a word did he speak, and it might almost be said not a thought did he think. His involuntary muscles and functions went on with their work, but every faculty, physical or mental, over which he ordinarily exercised volition was at a standstill. In only one way did he give any evidence of his ordinary reason-

ing powers. He presently turned to look towards the library door.

"Oh, that's all right," said Miss Matilda. "I shut it when I came in. I intended to speak of this restaurant business before long," she went on to say, "and I may as well do it now as at any other time, for it is a matter which concerns Mr. Crisman and myself as much as it does you. I began to suspect you had something to do with Vatoldi's when you used so often to urge mother and me to go there, and made a point of it especially on those days when you knew we were going shopping with the carriage. Mother never thought anything about it, but it struck me that you wouldn't take so much interest in a place of that sort if you didn't make something out of it. At first I supposed you had merely put some money into the concern, but I got into the habit of watching you when you were sitting in your regular place at the upper end of the room where you could see everything, and if ever a man looked like the proprietor of an establishment, you looked like the proprietor of Vatoldi's. I remember one day that two young men came in and sat down with their hats on, and John People was so busy he didn't see them; but you looked at him just as you look at our two little girls in church, and the instant he caught your eye you told him, just as plainly as if you had spoken, to attend to those two men, which he immediately did. And then, when the strike began there, and the boycotting, and all that sort of thing, and I saw how you were troubled, that stamped and sealed the matter in my mind. I knew very well that you would never

concern nor worry yourself so much about a business that didn't belong to you. Still I didn't know whether you were only a partner or sole proprietor, but when I saw John People up in the country this summer, I asked him if the restaurant belonged to one person or a firm, and he answered, 'One person,' and immediately changed the conversation. He had no idea what his words meant to me, but he might just as well have said, 'Your father is the proprietor.' I kept this little bit of knowledge entirely to myself, knowing it would be of use some day. I think it is the first really valuable possession I ever acquired entirely by my own exertions, and I am sure it comes in very well now. If you had not shown so much objection to my marriage with Mr. Crisman, I should not have mentioned it at present. But I should have spoken of it before long, so it does not matter. I won't say anything more this evening, but will leave you to think over the subject of my engagement. I will say, though, that Mr. Crisman is a very genteel and stylish young gentleman, and that mother is entirely satisfied with him. You know the house he is in is one of the best in the city, and there isn't a speck of fault of any kind to be found with him. As to money, he can make it fast enough if he is properly helped."

With this remark Miss Matilda left the room.

What was in Mr. Stull's mind during the next three days nobody knew. Even his wife, although she saw that the soul of her consort was a storm-center of passion, heard nothing from him except an occasional thunder-clap of indignation concerning her complicity in Matilda's engagement. That there

was some reason greater than this for the wrath that raged within him was plain enough to her, but she had no idea what it was, and her daughter would not tell her.

To Miss Matilda, her father spoke not a word during this period. He ignored her. He did not even look at her. In fact, he had very little to say to any one. When he was at home he shut himself up for the greater part of the time in his library, and when John came to him at the bank he spoke as few words as possible, and made no allusion to his manager's intended marriage. John was content to wait awhile for his employer's decision, but he had determined, no matter what the decision might be, that he would marry Miss Burns.

But Matilda was of a different turn of mind. She was not willing to wait more than three days for a decision concerning her affairs. At the end of that time she went to her father's study, where she knew he had shut himself up. When she entered she closed the door quickly behind her and stood by it, her hand still on the knob. Her father on seeing her sprang so suddenly to his feet that he nearly overturned the table before him.

"Now, don't shout out anything, father," she said, "for old Miss Manderson is in the parlor with mother, and if you begin that way I shall open the door, and if she hears you abusing your daughter the whole church will soon know it. As you won't speak to me, I have come to speak to you. I have been thinking over this matter, and I have worked out in my mind the very best things that you can do. In the first place, you must give up that restaurant business; it

isn't fair to me, nor to Mr. Crisman, nor to mother and the girls, nor to yourself, for that matter, that you should keep it any longer. The secret is sure to be found out, and very soon, if John People gets married, which I know he will, and think he ought to, besides, for the young woman is very suitable. I have bought things of her several times in order to find out what sort of person she is. If that restaurant matter is made public while you are still in the business it will ruin us all as far as society is concerned, and you have no right to bring anything of that kind upon Mr. Crisman and me, to say nothing of your wife and two young daughters. I don't want to seem hard, but I have got to speak the truth. If it is found out after you are out of the business it will be bad enough, but it will be a different affair. I know very well that in this city it doesn't matter much what a man has been, but it matters very much indeed what he is. You can either sell out to John People, or to somebody else, and take a mortgage on what he can't pay cash for, so you will still have an income from the place without having anything to do with it. And the sooner you get rid of it, the safer and better it will be for us all."

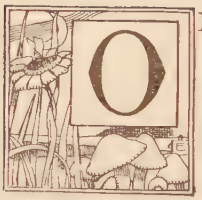
During this speech Mr. Stull had remained standing, and at two or three points his lips and face had moved as if the provocation to speak had been stronger than the resolution he had taken to hold no converse with this unnatural daughter; but, as was usually the case with him, his resolution triumphed, and he remained sternly silent. No one but his daughter Matilda could have forced a communication

of any kind upon him, but he knew well that unless he was willing to take the consequences of a very disagreeable scene,— which he was not,— he would be obliged to listen to her.

There was another reason why, in spite of the rage which boiled within him, he stood and listened to his daughter: he was keenly interested in what she was saying.

Miss Matilda continued: "As for Mr. Crisman and me, the best thing to do is to consider that matter as settled, because, having made up my mind to marry him, of course I shall do it. If you ever intend to give me any money at all, there can be no better way to do it than to let Mr. Crisman have it, and put it into his business and be made a partner. He told me that the 'Co.' is composed of persons belonging to the house who have been taken in, in that way, and he says a partnership is open to him whenever he has the money. That will not only help me to become a rich woman, but will also give me a position in society, for being the wife of a partner in a leading mercantile firm is very different from being the wife of a mere salesman. And you know that my position in society will be as much to you and all the family as it is to me. That is all I have to say, and if you have made up your mind not to speak to me for a week, I don't object to waiting for the three or four days that are left; but if it is for a longer time than that, you'd better write to me what you decide to do. And now I'll go and send somebody to see if she can clean the carpet of that ink which you didn't know you spilled when you jumped up so suddenly."

## CHAPTER XXXIII



ON several occasions, moderately near each other, Mr. Stratford went to see Gay Armatt, and, together, they took up the old books and studies. But the reading and the discussing did not go on in the old way. Gay had lost her interest in her work and in her future, and seemed to have forgotten that she had had aspirations. If study did not actually tire her or bore her, at least the earnest enthusiasm with which she used to pursue it was entirely gone. Stratford was not slow to see this, and gradually, and always with sufficient reason, he lengthened the intervals between his visits to Gay; and then, taking advantage of standing invitations from some of his old friends, he went on a visit of a few weeks to Boston and Cambridge.

He was glad to go. Not only did he tell himself that his work with Gay was done, but she now told him, though not in words, that such work as he had been doing was done. The friends whom he visited did not find him quite the lively companion he used to be, and this proved to them that summers and autumns spent in quiet, sparsely settled mountain regions are not beneficial to the spirits of a man. One afternoon in Cambridge he was invited to attend

a Thursday tea given by the young ladies of the Harvard Annex, which invitation he promptly declined. The friend who had proposed to accompany him was much surprised.

"I thought you took an interest in the higher education of girls," she said, "and would like to see what we are doing at the Annex."

"That is all very true in the past tense," he answered, "but you really cannot expect a person always to take the same interest in a thing."

Mr. Arthur Thorne, however, made it a point to visit at Mrs. Justin's house as often as he could find any reasonable excuse for so doing. He saw a good deal of Gay, and, in a measure, his society interested her. He gave her no law lessons, nor did he talk upon any subject fifteen seconds after he fancied that she had lost interest in it, striving always to find out what would best please her. He was often able to engage her attention pleasantly, and after a time she became rather glad to see him. Every day he grew more and more in love with her, but of this Gay knew nothing. Had she been any one but herself, or even had she been truly herself, she might have seen it, but just now her mental as well as her physical powers were working slowly and feebly.

Mrs. Justin perceived plainly enough that Thorne's love for Gay was becoming devotion, and this knowledge greatly troubled her. But there was nothing for her to do. She could not, with any show of reason, throw obstacles in the way of the young man's visits, for she had no right to constitute herself the guardian of Mr. Stratford's interests, and these inter-

ests formed the only possible reason why Arthur Thorne's course should in any way be obstructed. If she could have used obstacles at all, they would have been piled up in the present path of Mr. Stratford, who was wandering away from what was most desirable, just, and right, not only for himself but for Gay, and even for poor Mr. Thorne, who was blindly and ardently striving for something which she was quite certain he could never possess.

One afternoon when Mr. Thorne called he was told that Miss Armatt was not well, and was confined to her room; and the next day, and the next, and a good many days afterwards, and often several times a day, he came and made inquiries, but he could not see her.

There was something the matter with Gay, believed to be malarial, which greatly prostrated her, but the disease was one in which the attending physician found very little of what might be called pronunciation. The malaria, which is so generally believed to be at the bottom of all disorders which do not assume definite and recognizable forms, declined to put forth any point which might advantageously be laid hold of. To add to this difficulty in the way of the physician, Gay would do nothing to assist him. All his appeals for coöperation on her part were totally unavailing. Food, medicine, and other agents for restoring health and strength had proved of so little service that after having lost her interest in them she seemed also to have lost interest in the effect they were designed to produce.

Mrs. Justin gave up all other pursuits of her life and devoted herself to the nursing of Gay. The

relatives in Maryland were written to, and the married sister came to this city, but was obliged soon to return to her home and her family of small children. Other doctors were called in to consult with Gay's attending physician, but still that sly, cunning, and malicious malaria refused to come forth from the roots of Gay's energy and life, among which it appeared to have intwined and intrenched itself.

Stratford came home from Boston, and on him fell not only the heavy weight of sorrow at the sad condition of his young friend, but sundry sharp stings from his own conscience and an amount of reproach and condemnation from Mrs. Justin for which he was not at all prepared. The time had passed, she believed, for ordinary censure or admonition. Stratford ought to be made to feel that on him alone depended Gay's restoration to health.

"Whatever else is the matter with Gay," she said, "I believe that her life is now ebbing away from her because she does not care for it. This world is empty to her. You made it empty, and you can fill it. Even now, if you become to her what you used to be, and give her the hopes which I am sure you once gave her, I believe she will want to live."

Stratford was much moved. "I cannot believe," he said, "that what you say is true. But even if it were true, and Gay's life depended on me, I could not save her as you propose without being false to her and false to myself."

Mrs. Justin looked almost angrily at him for a moment. "Then," she said, "you should not have taken from her the man who did love her."

Stratford walked home, his heart chilled and pained. The first thought that had come to him after Mrs. Justin's last words was that it was better that Gay should die than to be married to such a man as Crisman. But now he asked himself: Was it better? Hard, cold reason did not deny him her support, but the support was neither cheering nor bracing. "Can it be true," the other question came to him again and again, "that I am the only one who can make her care to live?" He had believed that Arthur Thorne could be such a one; but now, when things were coming to him very bare and true and sharp, he could not say to himself that he had unreservedly hoped that Arthur Thorne, or any other man, would take Gay Armatt wholly to himself. There is a selfishness that sometimes lives within our noblest impulses without our knowing it. Some sudden burst of light may make the impulse transparent and show us the little hard stone lying at the heart of it. Some such light now broke upon Stratford, but he saw nothing plainly. All that was clear to him was that he must assert again and again: "I will be true to myself, and, thereby, true to her!"

Two days after this, when Arthur Thorne came as usual in the afternoon to Mrs. Justin's house, he met Stratford, who was just leaving.

"You cannot see Mrs. Justin," said the latter, "she has been up the greater part of the night, and is now asleep."

"How is Miss Armatt?" asked Arthur.

"They tell me she is weaker to-day than she was yesterday," answered Stratford.

"And that is what they said yesterday," said Thorne.

"Yes," said Stratford; and turning away his face, he made a step towards the door.

Arthur laid his hand upon his arm. "Tell me," he said, in words low-spoken but trembling with force, "can it be that I am never to see her again?"

Stratford turned and put his hands upon his friend's shoulders and looked for a moment in his face. Then he said, speaking slowly: "I have been to see her physician this morning, and I am convinced he has given up all hope of a rally of her strength. My dear boy, I am afraid that you will never see her again." And with that he went away, leaving Arthur standing in the hall.

The two men were not rivals: they loved each other and were now especially drawn together; but it was impossible for Stratford to talk longer with Arthur. The half-hour before, Mrs. Justin had come to him, and, putting a cold white hand in his, had said: "We must think no more about those things of which we have been talking. It is now too late." She did not say, "even for you," but there was that in her large, sad eyes which carried these words straight into his heart.

Arthur Thorne stood in the hall until a maid-servant came to him; and knowing so well who he was and why he came, she gently told him that the nurse, who was preparing some broth for Miss Gay just now, would stop on her way upstairs, and might be able to tell him something about her. And she opened the drawing-room door and left him.

Without answer, Arthur walked into the room, and, after a few steps, stopped, his eyes upon the floor. He was waiting for no one; he expected no one; he stood there without a purpose; he knew nothing in the world but that he should never see Gay again.

This young man was truly, powerfully, overwhelmingly in love. Since he had not been able to see Gay, he had loved her more than when he had been with her. His soul reached out towards her with an agony of craving that only a wildly loving heart can understand. His love was based upon no hopes, no expectations, no purposes; it had nothing to do with the future, nothing to do with the past; it was, simply, that now, this very moment, he loved her; his soul lived in her. And now he knew that never again should he hear her voice, never look into her eyes, never see her, in life again!

His blood ran fire and ice. He knew it was true that, although she was not dead, she had gone from him. He had no rights; he was nothing to her; he had never made himself anything to her. Why should any one allow him to see her again? To all intents and purposes he was an outside stranger. He would never see her again!

Suddenly his body trembled. His right hand stretched itself open, and then shut close and tight. His soul rose up in rebellion. This thing could not be. Heaven and earth might say so, but he would not admit it. It must be that he should again see Gay. She was not his Gay, but she possessed him wholly and utterly. He must see her again in life

were it only one glance at a tip of a curl of her hair.

Arthur Thorne was the most conventional of men, but down about him fell his conventionality as if it had been shaken to pieces by an earthquake.

He put his hat upon a chair; he listened; he knew exactly what he was about; every faculty rushed to the aid of the one action for which he now lived. He knew where Gay was. Mrs. Justin had told him of the large bright room at the back of the house adjoining the young girl's chamber, where, upon a lounge from which she could look out at the sky, she lay through the livelong day, thinking less, eating less, living less, as each day passed on. "It may be this is the one moment," Arthur said to himself, "in which I can see her. The nurse will come up, Mrs. Justin may awake, the relatives are expected. Now!"

With noiseless steps he passed along the hall, then up the one flight of softly carpeted stairs to a door with a portière partly drawn across it. He looked through the narrow opening into the large bright room in which of late his thoughts had so constantly dwelt. And, O Heavens! there was Gay, upon a lounge, close to the window, the sunlight falling on the soft folds of her lightly tinted dress and on the bright colors of a shawl thrown partly over her. It was Gay! He saw her!

The young girl lay perfectly motionless, her face slightly turned towards the window, her half-open eyes gazing out into the bright air but looking upon nothing. Her beautiful face was not changed in contour; all the roundness and softness and delicacy

of outline were there, but the color had faded away. Her light-brown almost golden hair curled and waved, as of old, upon her forehead, and a mass of it was thrown to one side upon a cushion on which her head was resting. Her little hands were clasped together under her shawl, and they were very thin, and her form, under its soft drapery, was thin and weak and almost done with everything.

Gay, herself, was nearly done with everything. It was not a malady of the soul or of the affections which had prostrated this young girl, and under which her life was wasting. It was, indeed, that malignant and subtle spirit of disease for which the doctors had been seeking, and which would, long ago, have come forth, its head bowed for the death-stroke, had Gay brought up her forces against it. But she brought up none. Medicine and skill can do nothing without the assistance of vital force, and the only warfare in which Gay's young soul was able to engage seemed directed against her vital forces. All that would sustain her body or her mind had become repulsive to her. Her soul had ceased to be hungry, and the example of her soul was followed by her body.

This girl had been true to every normal impulse of her nature. She had had a purpose in life, noble, intellectual, of high aim. But this had not been all. She had loved. Thus stood her woman's nature, equipped for the battle of life. But love had been taken from her, roughly and suddenly, and the manner of its taking had been such that it had gone, absolutely and utterly. There had been nothing to take the place of this love. The warmest, truest friendship

could not do it. Already a true friendship, unripened into love, had shown its powerlessness. What was left was a half-soul; and girls like Gay, with half-souls, die.

Gay was in a dream. It was a day-dream, although not one which sprang from her own volition. She was too weak for that now. Whatever came into her mind wandered there of its own accord; and the dream that now came to her was one of earlier days, of the days when her life began to fill with purpose and meaning, and yet days that were so near they scarcely seemed to belong to the past. Into this dream came all her youth and happiness; and so came love. But it was not a vision of flowing streams and bending shades, of warm-tinted, sunset skies, of the majesty of mountains, or the wide-spreading verdure of the fields. No kindred soul breathed to her words of high intent and stirring hope. She wandered in thoughtless, bright content with the young Charley she first had known and loved. The moonlight of their walks fell upon city squares and parks. They talked and laughed in the midst of walls and windows, cold ceilings and unyielding floors, but the spirit of young love made these as delicate of tint and tone, as odorous of perfume, and as soft of footfall as white clouds in the clear blue sky, the tender blossoms of the grape, and the soft grass upon the fields. This was the early, fresh, and blossom love, and as it first showed the signs of woman's life within her, so memory, wandering freely, went back to it and sat beside it, finding it purer, sweeter, more enduring than all else.

And thus the young girl lay, knowing no present and no future; lost even to all the past except that she was simply happy, and held the boy, Charley, by the hand.

Suddenly she felt a touch upon her shoulder. A man was kneeling by her.

"I could not help it," he said. "I saw you, and I could not keep myself from coming to you. Will you not speak to me, dear Gay?"

She slowly turned her head towards him, and her large eyes opened wide, but in them was no surprise, no questioning. Just now dreams were to her like real life, and real life like a dream. She wondered not at either.

"Mr. Thorne," she said, in a voice very low and perfectly calm.

"Yes," said Arthur, his words trembling with passionate emotion which he was struggling to subdue, "it is I, and I came to tell you — Heaven has given me this chance, and I must tell you quickly. O Gay, I love you! I have loved you almost ever since I knew you! And now, dear Gay, it nearly kills me —"

The poor fellow could not speak his mind. His fine sensibilities would not suffer him to say to Gay that he could not let her die without knowing that he loved her. But this is what he meant.

Gay looked at him very steadily and quietly. Her mind was going back. "Was that the reason that you taught me law?" she said.

"It was the reason I lived," said Arthur. "It was the reason for everything I thought, and everything I did. O Gay, perhaps I ought to have told you before, but then I did not think — and afterwards

came the time when there was no opportunity. But now I have this one chance. I know that you may not care anything about me, but I could not help it! I must come and tell you how I love you, love you, love you!"

As he spoke tears came into his eyes, and some of them rolled down his cheeks. Gay looked at him with more interest than she had looked at anything for days, but her manner was still very quiet and apparently untouched by any emotion.

"Do you know," said she, "that I am not going to live?"

Thorne did not answer, but the expression that came into his face showed, even to the listless mind of Gay, that he knew it.

"It is a great pity," she said, her large eyes fixed upon him, "that you should feel this way now."

"I feel so now," he said, "and I shall feel so always. It don't make any difference what happens, I shall feel so all my life — always — forever!"

Gay still looked at him, but said nothing. Suddenly his manner changed.

"O Gay!" he exclaimed in a tone almost wild with importunity, "why will you die? It is too terrible, too dreadful! Why will you not do everything to make yourself live? They tell me you do not fight against Death. Why will you not rouse yourself up and fight against it? For the sake of everybody who loves you — for the sake of this beautiful world — for your own sake, dear Gay?"

She looked at him for a moment, a slight shade of uncertainty upon her brow. For weeks she had received from Mrs. Justin, from her doctor, from her

attendants and friends, the most earnest and anxious entreaties to battle against Death, but there was nothing in Gay's nature to give response to these prayers, and day by day they fell upon her ear colder and more commonplace. But the words spoken by Arthur Thorne, coming from him, and in this way, and at this time, and with something behind them of which her mind took cognizance but did not act upon, seemed altogether different and novel.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

Arthur did not answer. The words that came to him were too many, too ordinary, too weak. His eyes fell upon a tall, heavy flask, the sight of which struck a pang to his heart. He knew it well. It contained a strengthening and revivifying cordial which had been ordered by Gay's doctor, and which Arthur, at Mrs. Justin's request, had procured for her. This he had done more than a week before, and as it now stood between him and the light it told the tale of this young girl's surrender. Its contents had scarcely been tasted.

Arthur arose, and approached the table. He did not speak; he could scarcely shape his thoughts. The power of this remedy, upon which so much hope and reliance had been placed, had never been tried. Somewhere there was a cruel sin. He had made himself well aware of the nature of the cordial, for it concerned Gay. Pouring a small quantity of the liquid into a glass, he again knelt by the side of the young girl.

"Will you not drink this?" he said. "It will help you to fight Death. Dear Gay, do not refuse it!" And he held the glass towards her.

She looked steadily into his eyes, and upon her lips came a smile, faint and shadowy; but no fainter nor more shadowy than the interest in life and this world that awoke within her.

"If you wish it so much, I will try," she said. "But you must raise my head."

With the glass in one hand, Arthur passed the other beneath her head. Her soft masses of silky hair enveloped his hand, and some of it fell over his wrist. It was Gay's head that lay in his open palm, warm, round, and heavy. She could not lift it; he it was who should raise it! Every fine hair that touched him seemed to send an electric thrill throughout his soul and body; it belonged to that dear Gay whom he loved.

Slowly and gently he raised her and placed the glass to her lips. She drank it, and then he tenderly lowered her head and drew out his hand from her hair.

Gay turned her eyes towards him with a full, earnest gaze. "Thank you," she said, "and I think you had better take some of it yourself. You are very pale."

That she should say it was enough. He rose to his feet, poured out a glassful of the cordial and drank it. Then he came back to the lounge.

"Do you feel better?" she said.

For a few moments Arthur could not speak, and, when he did, his voice was husky and slightly tremulous. That she should think of him!

"Dear Gay," he said, "will you not let them give it you? Think of this dear world, and do not die. And now I must go. Perhaps I have staid too long. But I have seen you! I have told you!"

She drew out from under the shawl one of her thin little hands, and Arthur clasped it in both of his own. He was about to press upon it a passionate kiss, but with a sudden effort he restrained himself. He had told her; that was all; and he had no right to touch her with his lips. His eyes filled with tears, and he left the room.

When the nurse, who had experienced delaying difficulties in the preparation of a delicacy with which she designed to tempt whatever lingering trace of appetite might yet remain with her young charge, heard above her the quick closing of the front door, she exclaimed: "There! that gentleman has gone! But I can't say I'm sorry. It's a harder thing to answer his questions now than it ever was before."

An hour or two afterwards she said to Mrs. Justin: "I wish that young gentleman had staid, for I know it would have pleased him wonderful to hear that Miss Armatt took three tablespoonfuls of the broth I made for her. How she suddenly came to have all that appetite I can't imagine."

Gay was then sleeping, and when she awoke Mrs. Justin was sitting by her side. The eyes of the young girl instinctively moved towards the window, outside of which the air was still bright with the light of day; but suddenly she turned them on her friend.

"Dear," she said, "don't you want to give me some of that drink Mr. Thorne poured out for me?"

"Mr. Thorne!" exclaimed Mrs. Justin.

"That is it," said Gay, glancing towards the table. "He was very good, and I am glad I took it."

## CHAPTER XXXIV

HEN our poor Gay had been sufficiently aroused from her lethargy of soul and body to make one feeble stroke in the battle against Death, the action and its result appeared to interest her, and she made other strokes with encouraging effect. Day by day her arm grew stronger, her attitude more determined, until the enemy, from falling back little by little, retreated altogether, accompanied by the insidious ally who had incited him to the conquest of Gay's young life.

To all Gay's friends this was a season of great rejoicing, and to Mrs. Justin it was a resurrection. She had watched the gradual death of the bright, strong young friend she had known so well, and had seen her utterly pass away, leaving in her stead a helpless, listless, careless being whose living was not life and of whom there was but little left to die. But now Gay was once more the true Gay, not yet quite her old self, but hour by hour approaching nearer to that most lovable creation.

As she grew stronger her friends came to her; and among them, Stratford. This friend, from the moment he had heard of the change in Gay, had

braced himself for action should she return to that life which had been supposed lost to her. In that event there must be no doubt, no indecision, no hesitation; his part must be chosen and must be enacted steadfastly and honestly unto the end.

There was no hesitation, no doubt, no indecision. He came to her as the friend of old, the adviser, the helper, the master. These, and no more, he intended ever to be. Without a question or a thought, Gay seated herself at his feet. To her the action was again as natural as when she had sat there before.

Arthur Thorne came also to Gay; came earlier than Stratford. He had told Mrs. Justin of that memorable interview with the almost dying girl, and he concealed nothing of what he had done, or felt, or said. Mrs. Justin smiled sadly. Her heart was pained, but she could not reproach him. If it should be that he had given Gay back to her, he deserved gratitude which could not be measured. She was ready to yield him this, but she gave him no more. His hopes were not her hopes.

When Gay was strong enough to come into the library and sit in the easy-cushioned chair before the tall wide window, Arthur, as has been said, was among her earliest visitors. Nothing could have induced him to deny himself this privilege, and yet it was a hard thing for this young man to present himself before this young girl. He had said all that lover could say, but as a lover he must now say nothing. What may burst forth from a full soul to one whose life is ending must be repressed when that life is slowly and feebly beginning again. He must

meet her as though that other meeting had not been, and without knowing what effect his words had had upon her.

Arthur had plunged into love's Rubicon, but he had not crossed it. Chilling and dangerous as might be its waters, he would make no stroke forwards until the time had come for him to seek his fate upon the other shore.

While Gay had been constantly in the mind of Arthur, so into Gay's mind, as she quietly lay on her lounge and in her chair during the happy hours when in a slow and steady tide her health and strength flowed back upon her, came thoughts of Mr. Thorne. On that day when his voice had roused her from her dream of girlhood and from her half-unconscious gazing into the bright world of empty air beyond her window, she had not wondered when she turned and saw him at her side. The faculty of wonder had gone to sleep or had died. All things to her were commonplace and ordinary. But it was not long before the recollection of that kneeling figure by her side caused wonder to revive. At first she asked herself why he had come to her? why it had been he who had incited her to turn on Death and resist him? But this question she did not ask long; it answered itself. She remembered well his words, and having looked on his pale and earnest countenance, it was impossible to forget it, or to misconstrue its meaning. Then she asked herself, Why did he feel this way? Thus questioning, musing, pondering, she went back over her intercourse with Arthur Thorne, called to mind this and that thing he had done or

said, suited motives to his actions, or resolved his actions back to motives, and so Arthur came often and dwelt long in her thoughts without meeting with any hustling or incommoding company.

The matter was now plain enough to her on his side, but not at all plain on hers. Often and often she tried to make it plain to herself on her side, but she could not do it. She came to the conclusion that this was something too hard for her just now, and she gave up the attempt. One definite thing she did for Mr. Thorne,— she gave him a new position in her mind. Up to this time she had always looked upon him as a Number Two. He was gentle; he was considerate; he was kindness itself; he was talented; he had learned many things and he knew how to think for himself; he was handsome, with the bearing of a gentleman; and in his soul she had found many sympathies; but, notwithstanding all this, she had looked upon him as a Number Two. But now there was a change. Speaking as he had spoken, and feeling as he had felt, no matter why or to what end, there was no one to whom Arthur Thorne could stand second.

When the time came that she could see visitors the heart of Gay was troubled. Of course he would come to see her, and what would he do? His presence might be embarrassing, but then, on the other hand, it would be so very strange if he did not come. What would he say to her? Would he look as he did when she last saw him? As for herself — what she should say, or think, or do, she knew not. The whole affair was very puzzling, and it depended so much upon circumstances.

When Gay's friends began to come to her, Mrs. Justin never left her alone with visitors. Enthusiasms and draughts needed her watchful eye. She too was anxious about Mr. Thorne, but when he came he brought with him no cold accompaniment of outer air, left behind him no open doors nor undrawn portière, and his manner was under the same quiet restraint that it was wont to be. But his face was very pale, and any stranger could have seen that his interest in Gay's condition was deep and true. Gay herself was a little pale at first, but this soon passed away. When he had gone, she fell into a state of wonder. Could it be true that all that had happened which she remembered? Or was it one of the queer dreams which had come to her at that time? But after he had made her two or three visits, Gay began to imagine that what she saw in him was an outer crust of kind restraint and tender regard for her new strength, and that there was something under this crust which sometimes shook it, although so slightly that perhaps no one knew it but herself. The presence of Mrs. Justin was a bar to words or emotion, but Gay wondered that there was not the least little bit of a sign that he remembered what he had said; if, indeed, he had ever said it. If he ever should speak, would he show that he had repented having been carried away by his sorrow that she was going to die? Or would he think it well not to speak again? Or would he repeat what he had said?

Gay was quite right when she thought she saw beneath Arthur's quiet restraint some signs of internal commotion. In fact he was torn, he was almost

riven; he slept not by night, nor took aught of comfort in his life. He, too, questioned himself, but he only asked: "What does she think of me? What does she expect of me?"

One day, when Arthur was with the two ladies in the library, Mrs. Justin was called away to receive a visitor. Gay offered no opportunity to the embarrassment of silence, and began instantly to speak.

"Do you know, Mr. Thorne," she said, "that I have a very funny idea about you? I believe that you have forgotten my name, and that you are ashamed to ask anybody what it is. You don't address me by any name whatever, and I sometimes fancy that while you are sitting here you are going over the alphabet in your mind, hoping in that way the name will come to you, and I suppose that in such cases people generally slip too quickly over A, because it is the first letter, and they are in such a hurry to get on to the others."

Arthur drew closer to her. "Once," he said, speaking very quickly, and in a low tone, "I called you by a name which perhaps I had no right to use, but, until I know that, I can never call you by any other. Do you remember?"

A tender glow came into Gay's cheeks and temples as though the fair Hygeia had suddenly touched her with a wand and sent into her veins the rich young blood which once coursed through them. There was a faint sparkle in her eyes, but this was hidden by the long lashes which now shaded them.

"You spoke very kindly to me that day," she said. "You were so good to me —"

"Oh, don't speak of kindness," interrupted Arthur. "I beg you not to think of that now. Don't you remember that I called you Gay? that I said I loved you? Don't you remember that?"

"I remember," said Gay, speaking very softly, with her eyes still more shaded, "but I have thought—have fancied—that it might have been one of those dreams I used to have."

"It was not a dream," said Arthur, a trembling earnestness in his voice. "It was all real. Oh, Gay, dear Gay, I called you that. I said I loved you. May I call you so again? May I say so once more?"

"Mr. Thorne," said Gay, still speaking very softly, "I think that this is all too soon. You could not have had those feelings very long; and as for me,—not knowing but it might be a fancy or a dream,—what you now say seems to come so unexpectedly. Do you not think you ought to wait?"

"Wait!" exclaimed Arthur. "How long?"

"I don't know," said Gay—"some time."

"And may I love you while I wait?" asked Arthur.

The glow on her cheeks and temples increased somewhat, as if Hygeia had forgotten to remove her wand, and it spread to the little ears which lay among the soft light brown, almost golden, hair which once had covered Arthur's hand, and even spread itself upon his wrist. The light in her eyes, now but slightly shaded, seemed to flash something of itself into her lips, which tremulously moved, as though they held between them a word with which they might play but not let go. But the word was too strong for them, and as for a moment Gay's large

eyes were turned upon Arthur's glowing face, it made a quick escape.

"Yes," said Gay.

Wait! Who on earth could have waited?

Arthur did not; in a moment he had her in his arms. And, when she was there, it came to her in a flash of consciousness that all the thinking she had been lately doing, all the wondering, all the questioning of herself, had been but the natural, simple, and certain pathway to those arms.

## CHAPTER XXXV

HEN Enoch Bullripple reached the Western town in which lived those persons who were said to have inherited legal rights in the Cherry Bridge farms, he found but one of them. This was a Mr. Hector Twombly, a man of about forty years of age, a very stout and even plump figure, a round face totally devoid of beard, red cheeks and lips, and with as much of an outward air of boyishness as is compatible with forty years of actual age. By profession he was a stock-raiser, a general merchant, a grist and saw mill owner, and one of the proprietors of an important stage and mail route.

Mr. Twombly listened with great attention to Enoch's account of the business which had brought him there, and then he invited the old farmer to take supper with him, and to stay all night, and, in fact, to make his house his home as long as he should be in that part of the country. The next morning, in the very plainly furnished counting-room of his store, in which the greater part of his extensive and varied business was conducted, he communicated to his visitor his decision regarding the Cherry Bridge property.

"Now, then, Mr. Bullripple," said Mr. Twombly, sitting up very straight in his chair, with one plump, well-shaped hand upon each of his outspread knees, "this is about the size of this business as it appears to me. My uncle, Thomas Brackett, who I never saw and have heard very little about,—my mother having married young and come out here pretty much among the first settlers,—owned the farm you live on and that other one, and when he died they went, naturally enough, as everybody thought, to his nephew Peter, who was living with him, and who everybody looked upon as the same thing as his son and heir. That is the way in which I have heard the matter stated."

"You've put it just right," said Enoch.

"Now, then, when Mr. Peter Brackett walked into the property there wasn't nobody there to ask any questions, and it isn't likely that Mr. Peter Brackett bothered his head about any sister of his uncle who went out West ever so long ago, and might be dead by that time, for aught he knew. Perhaps he never heard of her."

"You bet he did!" said Enoch, "but that's neither here nor there."

"No," said Mr. Twombly, "that's neither here nor there. Well, then, after a while Mr. Peter got tired of farming and concluded to sell out, and he did sell out to you and to that other gentleman, and you two paid for the property, cash down, clean and finished, bargain and sale. You showed me your papers, and I suppose the other gentleman could show his, if he was here."

"Yes," said Enoch, "but that farm was first bought

by my brother-in-law, and he had to give a mortgage on the land. This was took up and paid by Mr. Stull, who now owns the farm."

"All right," said Mr. Twombly. "You and Mr. Stull now own the two farms, having bought and paid for them; and then, somehow or other, you hear that old Tom Brackett had other nephews besides the aforenamed Peter, and that I am one of them and my brother Ajax the other, and you come out here and put the whole case before me. Now, it ain't for me to ask whether you did this because you was so touchy honest that you couldn't sleep in your bed till you knew everybody had his rights, or because you thought somebody else might come out here and make a bargain with us and so get the inside track of you. That's what I haven't got the right to bother myself about."

"No," said Enoch, "you hain't."

"But this much I have got a right to do, and that is to say that when you bought that farm you bought it, and when you paid for it it was yours. Now, if I and my brother Ajax have any rights in this business, and there isn't any doubt but what we have, our rights are in the money that Peter Brackett got for those farms, and not in the farms themselves, which you two men have fairly bought and paid for."

"That's not the way the law looks at it," said Enoch. "Peter Brackett sold what wasn't all his."

"That's the way I look at it," said Mr. Twombly. "Durn the law! And my brother Ajax will look at it just as I do, because if he don't I'll break his back, and he knows it. Now, sir, we've got nothing to do

with those two farms that have been fairly bought and sold. What we've got to do with is the money Peter Brackett got for them. You've told me where he is settled, and when we're ready we'll come down on him. That's our business. And all we've got to do with you is to have the papers made out, giving you a clear title to your farm, as far as I and Ajax are concerned. My lawyer here will attend to that, and there is a cowboy in town who is going to start out early to-morrow morning to the ranch where Ajax is just now, and he'll sign them and send them back day after to-morrow. And if that Mr. Stull wants his business fixed up in the same way, all he's got to do is to send his documents out here and let me see for myself that everything is all straight, and we'll give him the same sort of title as we give you."

Thereupon Mr. Twombly and Mr. Bullripple shook hands on the bargain. And while waiting for the arrival of the return cowboy with the signature of Ajax, Enoch's host drove him about the surrounding country in a handsome buggy with two fast trotters, showed him over his two mills and his store, his stock-yards and his stage-stables, and gave him to eat and drink of the best and the most abundant.

When Mr. Bullripple returned to Cherry Bridge, he felt that he now truly owned his farm, but that he had lost his opportunity of triumphing over Mr. Stull and Zenas Turby. It was true that he had prevented those two plotters from triumphing over him. Enoch had expected more than this, but this was really so much he felt that he ought to be satisfied. He had, indeed, come off wonderfully well.

But there was a minor triumph left open to him, and the crafty old farmer was not slow to avail himself of it. He would assume the position of the benefactor of Mr. Stull. He would say to him: "You need trouble yourself no more about this affair; I have been out West myself and have arranged everything with the heirs of your property. I will tell you exactly what you have to do in order to make your title quite secure. I am very glad to be able to put you once more on a sound footing in our part of the country; and this, too, without any trouble or expense on the part of yourself or your agents."

Enoch knew that this would be very hard on J. Weatherby Stull, whose soul would naturally scorn the idea that it was possible for any one to bestow a benefit upon him, especially one whom he hated on account of injuries conferred. He knew too that by this course of action he would deal a heavy, although an indirect, blow at his old enemy, Zenas Turby. Enoch had put this and that together to such purpose that he had become convinced that Turby was Stull's agent in this matter of the Cherry Bridge farms; and that, when the principal should be made aware that the whole business had been settled without the knowledge of his agent, the latter would, as Enoch put it to himself, "ketch fits."

To a certain extent Enoch's plan was quite successful. When Mr. Stull was informed of what had been done he was angry, and would have been mortified had he not attributed the failure of his scheme to the stupidity of Turby, who was summoned to New York, and who did, in very truth, catch fits.

Had this failure of a well-planned project occurred a month or two earlier, Mr. Stull would have been much more affected than he now was. Other plans and purposes had failed about the same time, and the strong mind of Mr. Stull was rising above the storms which beset him, in order that he might see how he could take advantage of them. It was his custom to turn, if possible, bad fortune, as well as good, to his advantage. When he discovered that his ownership of Vatoldi's was becoming dangerous, not only on account of John People's intended marriage but because of his daughter Matilda's possession of his secret, and her opposition to a Vatoldi connection, and when he found out that Matilda would certainly marry Mr. Crisman, with or without paternal consent, he was at first extremely indignant, and afterwards sternly resolved.

He brought his mind to the determination that Vatoldi's had had its day, and must be put behind him, but he would put it behind him in his own and in an advantageous way. He came to the same decision concerning his daughter's marriage. Crisman, he found, was a man of good character and fair connections and of more than the average business ability. If his hard-headed and inflexible daughter would marry this man she might do so, and he would place the couple in a position which would be creditable to himself and his family, and in which Crisman might rise if he should prove equal to mercantile soaring. Then Mr. Stull would put Matilda and her husband behind him. Another object grander than a restaurant or a daughter's marriage loomed up before him, and to this he would devote his life.

When John People was informed by Mr. Stull that the latter had decided that John should buy out Vatoldi's, the young man was frightened. It was too much! He would much prefer that Mr. Stull should sell out to some one else, and that he should continue as junior partner and manager. But Mr. Stull told him that it was impossible to sell to any one else. The transaction could take place between John and himself, and no others. The terms decided upon by Mr. Stull were not easy ones. John was to raise a certain sum in cash, and pay it down; he was then to make payments at fixed and frequent intervals both as interest and as installments on the remainder of the high price put upon the establishment, which would make it necessary for him to do a very lucrative business, and for a long time to hand over to Mr. Stull a very large proportion of his profits.

When Miss Burns heard of Mr. Stull's purpose in this matter she was not frightened. It would be a hard and long fight, she knew, but she advised John to go into it. In fact, she decided that he should go into it. As soon as the transfer of the business should be completed they would marry, and then she would give up her position in the store, and enter, heart, soul, and body, into her husband's business. She would sit behind the desk and be the cashier, thus saving money to John and giving him the opportunity to be in all the other places in which he ought to be, and to do all the other things which he ought to do.

John People is now owner of Vatoldi's. He has not paid for it, and it will be years before he does so, but,

so far, he has fulfilled all his obligations. His brow has been a good deal furrowed by the necessity of hard work and careful calculation in order to do this, but all signs of resignation have disappeared from it, and have been succeeded by a general air of cheery earnestness. His wife is much plumper than when she was Miss Burns; sweet-breads, lamb-chops, and all the delicacies of the restaurant are her own whenever she wants them, without a preliminary reservation in the corner of an ice-box. Mrs. People makes her son long visits, especially in the winter, when there is little to do at the farm, and although she thinks John the most fortunate as well as the most deserving of men, she is convinced that no better fortune ever befell him than when he escaped the clutches of that Stull girl.

There is one great change in the Vatoldi establishment: Mr. Stull is never seen there. He has put it behind him. The restaurant, however, is as well managed and as popular as it ever was.

"I shall make it a rule," said John People to his wife, "to manage that place exactly as if I expected, at from fifteen to twenty minutes past one, to see Mr. Stull walk in at the door and clap his eyes on everything on the premises, from a spot on a table-cloth to an overdone steak."

Thus over the fortunes of Vatoldi's hovers the invisible but protecting influence of J. Weatherby Stull.

The good fortune of John People not only bore heavily upon that young man, but upon his Uncle Enoch. Mr. Bullripple entirely approved of the pur-

chase of Vatoldi's, although he fully appreciated the weight of the load that it would lay not only on his nephew's shoulders, but his own. John had not been able to save much money, and in order to make the first cash payment it was necessary that he should be generously helped. To this end Enoch collected every cent that he could possibly gather together, and put himself under obligations to Mr. Stratford for the remainder of the money needed. The old farmer had no fear but that in the course of years John would be able to pay back everything, and would eventually die a rich man. If his nephew had desired assistance in order to enter into agricultural pursuits Mr. Bullripple would not have lifted a finger to aid him. But he had great faith in the right kind of a restaurant.

Miss Matilda had most truly succeeded in her various plans, but while she was entirely satisfied, she was not elated. She had expected to succeed. She thoroughly understood her father's character, and although she knew that it would be utterly impossible to dam or stop the powerful current in which his nature flowed, it was quite possible, were the impediment wide enough, high enough, and solid enough, to turn the stream in a new direction. She could be such an impediment, and having thrown herself across his current, suggesting at the same time a change of channel, she was not at all surprised to see the change made.

In the course of the winter Mr. Crisman and Miss Stull were married in a manner entirely suited to the social position of the bride. To these proceedings Mr. Stull gave a lofty and dignified assent. The ele-

ment of interest in his approbation appeared to be but moderate, and, entirely contrary to his previous record, he interfered very little with the details of this important family occasion. It is probable, however, that no feeling, whether of apathy or disapprobation, could have prevented him from taking his usual place as director of affairs had he not known that that position had been assumed by his daughter Matilda.

With capital furnished by his father-in-law, Mr. Crisman entered, as a junior partner, the great mercantile firm of which he had been an employee, and he looked upon himself as in every way a most fortunate and successful man. In his marriage relation he was indeed quite fortunate. From the very beginning his wife set herself to work to manage him, and in order that she might do so without trouble to herself or dissatisfaction to him, she also set herself to work to make him happy. Having, by diligent study, made herself thoroughly acquainted with his character, she succeeded admirably in both these regards.

When Mr. Crisman thought of that love affair which antedated his engagement to Miss Stull,— and during said engagement such a thought did sometimes come to him,— he found that the place in his sentiments which once had been filled by this love was now occupied by a modified form of anger, which was principally aimed at a want of respect for his opinions, his position, and himself which had been exhibited by all the persons with whom that affair had connected him. But these thoughts came less and less frequently — like Mr. Stull, Crisman was a man who could put things behind him.

When the powerful current of Mr. Stull's action and interest had been turned from its course by his daughter Matilda, aided by the force of events, she had no idea of the new channel in which it would flow. No one, indeed, except her father, could have had such an idea, and even he, when he came to survey and fully comprehend the nature and extent of this fresh channel, was surprised at what he deemed its importance and its grandeur.

Mr. Stull was a man whose pleasure in life was to be found in lofty flight. Whether he soared as a restaurant-keeper, a social and church pillar, or as a financial operator, he wished to fly high and look down on his fellows; and his strength of wing was powerful and enduring. There were some flights he could not take, and these he did not essay. He would have liked to look down upon railroad kings, but he dwelt upon no Andes, nor were his wings of condor size.

He had long had in mind a scheme which pleased him much; and for some years he had thought that a great part of the fortune which he intended to leave behind him should be devoted to carrying out this scheme. But now his purpose was changed. His speculations and investments had been exceptionally successful, and he was a very rich man much sooner than he had expected to be. It was quite possible for himself to do, in these vigorous years of his natural life, what he had expected to order that others should do after his death. When this decision had been reached, it greatly gratified the soul of Mr. Stull. This new object of his life was far higher, far nobler,

than anything he had yet touched. It would give him loftiness, it would give him power.

Mr. Stull determined to found, create, and direct a Law Hospital. He had never studied law, nor did he pretend to understand its principles or practice; but, in the course of his varied business life, he had become acquainted with many phases of its effect upon society as well as many phases of its relations to the ordinary and to the extraordinary man. Pondering upon this subject, he had come to the conclusion that, in its general relation to mankind, law was to be looked upon in the same light as medicine and surgery. If the latter demanded hospitals for their perfect and complete practice, so did the former. As the means of amelioration or removal of those evils against which the powers of medicine and surgery are directed are open to all, so Mr. Stull thought the amelioration or removal of those evils against which the power of the law is directed should be equally open to all. Therefore he determined to found a Law Hospital, where those persons who were unable to pay for legal protection should receive it as freely as the ailing poor receive medicine and treatment in hospitals of the other kind.

When Mr. Stull undertook an important enterprise, he brought his strong and practical intellect to bear upon its probable disadvantages, as well as its advantages, and before he spoke of this great scheme, he made himself quite ready to meet any objections that might be urged against it. When persons came to him and said that such an institution would have a very bad effect upon the poor, for it would encourage them

to be quarrelsome and go to law, Mr. Stull rose easily above the objectors and replied: "There is no more reason to suppose that than to suppose that the ordinary hospital encourages sickness or broken legs among the poor. It will be almost impossible for a sham or unworthy case to get into my institution. There will be a Board of Examiners, composed of high legal talent, who will investigate every application, and if there are not good grounds for taking it into the courts it will be rejected; but if, on the other hand, it shall be found to be based on good grounds, it will be carried through to the very end, to the very end, sir; if it should be the case of a brakeman against a millionaire, it will be carried through; you may be sure of that. And then, again, sir, it will prevent a great deal of litigation. There are lawyers, sir, who take up unjust cases for clients who are unable to pay, in hopes of sharing in unjust advantages. My institution will greatly assist in putting an end to such practices. The fact that it never takes up an unjust case will shine as an example, sir, and those who are unjustly proceeded against will find in my Law Hospital a strong ally in defense."

Mr. Stull was a vigorous upholder of strict justice. He was not generous, he was not forbearing, he had not a kindly spirit. His present enterprise was intended as much to defeat and humble the unjust rich as to assist the oppressed poor. If he could have legally revenged himself upon Enoch Bullripple he would have done so gladly; and had he seen another person oppressing the old farmer in a perfectly legal

way he would have had no disposition to interfere. Furthermore, what he did for the advantage of mankind must carry out some of his own practical ideas, and must be of advantage to himself. These conditions he fully expected the Law Hospital to fulfill.

In the first place, it would give him power and position. By its aid he might be enabled to take an occasional flight above the head of even a railroad king. There was no station which would please and suit him so well as that of the Founder and Director-in-Chief of the great institution he intended to establish. Then, again, he expected his Law Hospital to become a source of profit. It would be an admirable school of practice for young lawyers who would pay fees for this advantage, and who would not only be supervised by the body of high legal talent who would direct the operations of the institution, but would receive from said body much valuable assistance and instruction. The vast resources of the Hospital would be open, not only to the poor, but to those who would be able to pay, and its strictly regulated charges and prompt and vigorous methods would prove a great inducement to persons who would hesitate to place themselves in the power of unrestricted and irresponsible legal advisers.

The scope of this institution was a very wide one. It would be a great Law School; the decisions of its Board of Examiners would meet with such high regard that, in time, it would come to be looked upon almost in the light of a court of law; it offered to the poor the legal redress of wrongs; and to all men it would afford the opportunity of obtaining the

assistance of the law of the land in a systematic, economic, and perfectly practical and business-like manner.

And it would enable this generation, and in all probability many generations hereafter, to read on a marble slab in the great entrance-hall the name of its Founder and first Director-in-Chief, J. Weatherby Stull.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

S the winter months went on, the Goddess Hygeia did so truly touch with her wand the fair Gabriella Armatt that this young person bloomed out in full health and vigor; and when the jonquils in the little yard in front of Mrs. Justin's town house forced their tender blossoms into the uncertain air of spring, they were greeted with no happier eyes than those of Gay.

Our heroine was not one who had put things behind her. In her life it had seemed as if certain things had pushed her before them, and, remaining stationary themselves, had gradually faded from sight as she went on. That first young love, which had grown to be a true, conscientious, but anxious affection, had not gone on with her. She had now begun a new life, and it was a life without that old affection.

If, in those melancholy days in the past year when she seemed to be left alone in the world, her soul had, half unconsciously, looked towards Horace Stratford with vague feelings other than those of friend to friend or scholar to master, those feelings existed no more. Her new life had begun without them. When

Stratford looked upon her now he saw not that certain something, that sympathetic stamen which at times springs suddenly from a woman's heart, and which had made her perfect in his eyes; she was his friend, loyal and warm; she was his disciple, earnest and trusting; but on her face that certain something never appeared — for him.

The effect upon Arthur Thorne of his love for Gay was somewhat surprising, even to himself. He had thought it would change him, make a different man of him, but in fact it produced in him but little change that was radical. His tastes, his strict regard for the proper, and his conscientious views of duty to himself and society, still remained upon the solid foundations on which they had always stood, but into his nature had come a warm-hued liberality of feeling which was born of his admiration for Gay's nature.

Gay's nature was a strong one and fully animated, and it would have had its influence upon any man, but it could not put into a man's nature what was not there. With Crisman she would have failed utterly, but in the warm radiance of her influence the colors came out in the nature of Arthur Thorne as the bright spots and brilliant hues appear upon the wings of a moth as he draws their somber folds from his cocoon into the bright light of day.

As to Gay's aspirations and the life-work to which she had looked forwards, these two young people, from having widely different opinions, came to think alike. When Gay started on her course of advanced study, she had not definitely fixed her mind upon the special path in life to which this study was to lead

her, but she had determined that she would do something which should satisfy her ambition and be of service to other people. She had no notion that one whit of her work in college and afterwards should be wasted. She was to be something which should be worthy of herself, of her instructors, and of those heights of knowledge to which she hoped to climb. Even when she became engaged to Crisman her ideas did not change, although by the counsel of Mrs. Justin, and, subsequently, by the influence rather than by the direct advice of Stratford, she modified them. She would put her intellect in perfect training before she decided on what field she would send it forth to do battle. Even the academic degree to which she directed her course was looked upon more as a guiding-point than an object; she might never claim it, but if she made herself worthy of it her intellect would be well trained.

When Gay's purpose of study was made known to Arthur Thorne during the days he spent at Cherry Bridge, he was very much opposed to it and talked a great deal to Mrs. Justin about it. He believed that when any one entered upon a course of earnest endeavor, it should have a fixed and definite object. If the young lady intended to devote herself to any branch of philosophy, science, or literature, she should concentrate her energies upon those studies which would prepare her for her future work. When he became engaged to Gay this idea of the limitation and concentration of her energies, even at her present stage of progress, was still in his mind. But when the two had talked over the matter they came to

think alike. Arthur still believed that earnest study should have its object, but he soon understood that Gay had an object, and his soul expanded itself to appreciate its beauty and value. He agreed with her that the conviction that one's intellect has been well cultivated is a sufficient reward for the labor of the cultivation.

They would work together,—there could be no doubt about that,—and if the time came when they felt they were able to do something for the world which in a degree would repay the world for what it had done for them, then they would do the thing which they believed they best could do. If their young ambitions led them truly, they would not only penetrate to the head-waters of thought and knowledge, but they would lend their services towards clearing out their channels and digging down into their sources. But if ambition led them not so far, they would stop when they could feel content that they had fulfilled the duty they owed their intellects, and had done their best to qualify themselves to think and act and live.

There is no danger that they will flag in this projected career. They are strong, earnest, and enthusiastic; and in Stratford they will always have a wise and steadfast friend and backer. Their life-work and their life-love will go on together, and the one will not be interfered with by the other.

Gay and Arthur were married in the time of early roses; and then they went away and wandered joyously, coming back when the peaches were ripe and the juice of the grape-clusters was beginning to turn

red and purple. Then it was that Mrs. Justin invited the young couple to her house at Cherry Bridge, to which Stratford still came over from the Bullripple farm on most of the days of the week. These holidays of Gay and Arthur could not last much longer, for in the early autumn they must go into the city and begin the life they had marked out for themselves, which, for Arthur, would not be a very easy one, for it was necessary that his professional labors should keep pace with every other kind of work or study.

They made good use, therefore, of this pleasure-time, and Gay, knowing the country better than her husband, generally acted as guide and suggestor. She took him, at the close of a day, through the sugar-maple grove to the little eminence where they could sit on the top rail of the fence and see the sunset glories of the western sky. They rowed upon the creek, and it was astonishing what a memory Gay possessed for sunken trees, shallow places, and sharp turnings. She guided Arthur into the tributary stream overshadowed by the forest-trees, and they stopped at the spot in the heart of the woods where all seemed quiet and motionless save the dragon-flies and the flecks of sunlight on the surface of the pool, and where a spreading and low-hanging grape-vine formed a water-arbor under which a little boat might lie. Now the air bore not the perfume of the tender blossoms of the vine, but the wild grapes hung dark, though not yet ripe, from under their broad leaves, and Gay could put up her hand and touch them.

One morning the two were sitting together on a

rustic bench on the lawn. Gay held a book in her lap, on the blank leaf of which she was making a sketch, not from nature, but from her imagination. Arthur, one arm on the back of the seat, watched with ardent interest the rapid growth of the drawing. They were in the shade, but all the air was full of light. Gay was very lovely that day. She wore a morning gown of pale blue, the front generously draped with white soft-hanging lace which ran away in graceful lines into the folds which lay about her feet. The wide brim of her hat was lined beneath with light blue silk, which threw a subduing influence upon the golden tints which always seemed ready to break out in the masses of hair beneath it, and extended its shade over the fair face, now slightly bent towards the drawing. Upon the crown and broad straw brim of this hat were clusters of apple-blossoms, which lay as naturally as if it had been spring-time and they had just dropped there from some tree.

Mrs. Justin and Stratford were standing upon the piazza looking at the young people on the lawn. It was a charming picture and well worthy their contemplation.

"Now, sir," said the lady, "there we see the full fruition of your work. Are you satisfied with it?"

"I am," he answered. "It was good work. And are you yet fully content?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Justin, "I believe I am. You know it was hard for me to be content, but I am beginning to see that events, as you controlled them, have resulted in great good."

Stratford made no answer. If he had spoken from the depths of his heart he must have said that great good indeed had resulted from what he had done; great good to Gay, great good to Arthur, and even good to that first lover, Crisman; good to every one, except himself. For in the fight he had fought he had been hurt — he had conquered, but he had been hurt.

The essence of Mrs. Justin's nature was loyalty, loyalty to past affection, loyalty to present friendships, and it was the ardent earnestness of this sentiment which threw into her friendship a sensitive and perceptive sympathy. Stratford said nothing; but she saw in his face something of what he thought.

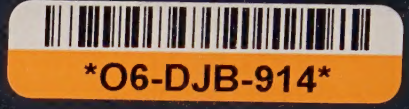
"My friend," said she, laying her hand upon his arm, "could you have loved that girl?"

"Yes," said Stratford, "I could have loved her."

Mrs. Justin looked at him intently for a moment, and then she said: "Horace Stratford, I believe that you, yourself, are the hundredth man you have been looking for."

An expression of surprise came into the face of Stratford, and then he smiled, but the smile did not last long. "If you think so," he said, "I accept your decision, and my search is ended."

THE END.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